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Dropout issue among ethnic minority students with disabilities has been a major issue for educational professionals in several decades. Among all student groups, American Indian students with disabilities continue to show a higher disproportionate representation in high school dropouts. Low student engagement has been documented as a major dropout predictor in the education literature. Therefore, this dissertation research was designed to understand the dropout phenomenon among American Indian students with disabilities by exploring school engaging experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities. Because phenomenological research begins in lived experiences, this research adopts this research methodology to advance our understanding of students' engaging experiences.

This research found that participants in this study may receive inappropriate education services, particularly those who exhibited behavioral challenges. We have noted that teacher-student relationship was described by all student participants as a major challenge they experienced at school. Their school engaging experiences were strongly influenced by their interactions with school teachers or other professionals. For students' misbehaviors, the disciplinary actions taken by teachers might be too severe. The control-oriented school context plays another factor intensifying students' misbehaviors at school. Family factor was observed as another factor influencing students' engaging experiences.

A HERMENEUTIC PHENOMENOLOGY STUDY OF SCHOOLING EXPERIENCES  
OF LUMBEE INDIAN STUDENTS WITH HIGH INCIDENCE DISABILITIES

by

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# **CHAPTER I**

## **BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY**

### **Introduction**

Since the 1960s, dropping out of high school among ethnic students with disabilities has been a challenging issue for education professionals and policymakers. At the same time, the interest in the dropout problem has started to increase among education professionals and the public, and it is well-documented in professional journals and popular magazines. Starting from 1980s, the issue of a disproportionate representation of high school dropouts among ethnic minority students, including American Indian and Alaska Native students, has drawn much attention (Reyhner, 1992; NCES 1989). In order to address the issue, federal and state governments implemented different types of dropout prevention programs and devised legislation to address this particular education issue (Frazer, 1991).

Even today, the dropout issue is still a major concern for educational professionals. In 2002, No Child Left behind (NCLB) was passed to ensure that all students are receiving an appropriate education, including ethnic minority students and students with disabilities, through an accountability mechanism. However, ethnic minority students and students with disabilities still continue to show a higher disproportionate representation among high school dropouts, particularly those students

with both ethnic minority background and a disability label (United States Department of Education, 2008; NCCRESt, 2009).

Among all ethnic minority students with disabilities, American Indian students have faced a great challenge in their schooling experiences. The challenge can be observed in their representation among high school dropouts. A national report indicates that the dropout rate of American Indians/Alaska Natives with disabilities age 6 to 21 was 44.6% compared to 31.1% for all students with disabilities (US Department of Education, 2008). At the state level, North Carolina has the largest American Indian population east of Mississippi (NCDPI, 2007). Lumbee Indians, whose tribe is recognized by the state and who mainly reside in North Carolina, were once reported as staying in the school longest during the segregation period (Peck, 1972), but they could not avoid the epidemic dropout phenomenon among the American Indian student population. The local report indicates that American Indian students have a highest dropout rate at 6.99% compared to 4.97% for all students (NCDPI, 2009). Even in Robeson County, where is considered as the center of Lumbee Indian community, American Indian students are still reflecting their struggle through low graduation rate (NCDPI, 2009). If considering the fact that only approximately half of students with disabilities are completing high school, Indian students with disabilities are in a disadvantageous position under given school practice, which has been supported by North Carolina dropout data (NCDPI, 2009).

Therefore, it will be very important to explore the schooling experiences of Lumbee students with disabilities to further understand what has been contributing

factors to this dropout phenomenon and why current school practice is not able to support Indian students with disabilities appropriately.

### **Research Problem**

According to the Twenty-Eighth Annual Report to Congress (United States Department of Education, 2009), students with disabilities and ethnic backgrounds are at a higher risk of dropping out. Students with disabilities age 14 and up consistently show a high dropout rate. Their dropout rates, which are calculated based on the proportion to each disability subgroup, are as follows: LD, 29.1%; mental retardation, 27.6%; speech and language impairments, 29.4 %; and emotional disturbance, 52.3%. Overall, students with disabilities age 14 and up account for 31.1% dropouts among all students served under IDEA. Although the dropout rate has been improved slightly in recent years, the school performance of students with ethnic backgrounds and disabilities remains very high, particularly for American Indian/Alaska Native students with disabilities (US Department of Education, 2008; 2009). The dropout rate of this student group has been greater than all other ethnic groups. The smallest gap is with African American students with disabilities, which is approximately 6.3%. The widest gap is with White students with disabilities, which is approximately 17.1%. Current literature has consistently suggested that American Indian students with disabilities have encountered greater challenges in their school experiences, which has a long-term impact on their life quality (Devoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008; Shannon & Bylsma, 2006; McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008). However, very limited research has targeted on this particular

population to investigate what challenges these students face under current education practice.

Current research indicates that school engagement has a crucial relationship with the dropout phenomenon (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Janosz, Amchabault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008; Lehr, 2004; Sinclair, Hurley, Evelo, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2002). Several researchers have conceptualized that dropping out of school is a developmental process that begins with student disengagement from their learning experiences. Before students decide to dropout out of school, they have shown signs of disengagement such as absenteeism, a history of course failure, grade retention, low participation in school activities, and negative attitudes toward school (Sinclair, Hurley, Evelo, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2002; Lehr, 2004). Klem and Connel (2004) also suggest student engagement, student achievement, and school behaviors all are related to each other, and this has been confirmed for various groups, including students who have social and economic advantages and disadvantages.

Most student engagement researchers have agreed that student engagement is a multidimensional construct influenced by many factors, depending on every individual student's interactional experiences with the surrounding environment (National Research Council, 2004; Harris, 2008; You & Sharkey, 2009; Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009). Another line of research has demonstrated that student disengagement may result from their unwillingness to engage with the cultural practice which exists in a form of academic or social expectations at their schools (Zyngier, 2007; Smyth, 2006; Gibson, 2006; Hughes, Russel, & Patterson, 2005). Student disengagement may be

perceived as resistance to engage with constructed cultural practice and an outcome of silencing student voice, particularly those who are marginalized by the current education system (Gibson, 2006).

Considering the school outcome of American Indian students with disabilities and limited research targeting this particular student population, it is essential for researchers to attend to their missing voice. Several researchers who put great emphasis on “voice discourse” have suggested that the valid knowledge which is taken for granted at the school system is being socially constructed and has emerged from the values, attitudes, and belief system of the dominant social group (Carey, 2003; Smyth & Hattam, 2001; Hughes, Russel, & Patterson, 2005). As a result, those students who are considered “outsiders” in the given school system may resist the taken-for-granted valid knowledge by disengaging with the school practice.

Therefore, a critical step to investigate the dropout phenomenon involving a potential developmental disengaging learning process of American Indian students with disabilities is to understand the issue from their perspective. I believe that exploring the schooling experiences of this student population will be valuable for school professionals and policy makers who have been seeking for a solution to the issue. Further, this research also can contribute to representing the voice of American Indian students with disabilities in the student engagement and dropout literature.

### **Purpose Statement**

Because empirical phenomenological research is designed to obtain comprehensive description based on individual experience to advance our understanding

of the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994), this dissertation will adopt it as the methodology for this study. The purpose of this phenomenological inquiry is to investigate the schooling experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities to explore their challenges in the learning process as well as their identity developmental process. Further, this study also will identify how students perceive they can be adequately supported to counter challenges encountered in the school setting.

### **Significance of the Study**

In current society, getting a high school diploma has been conceptualized as evidence of human competence. Such a taken-for-granted assumption is reflected in the crucial relationship between high school dropout rates and unemployment as well as lower socio-economic status (US Department of Labor, 2009). The challenge of receiving a high school diploma encountered by ethnic students with disabilities has formed a segregated system based on ethnicity, disability, and economic status under the guise of compulsory education.

Because American Indian students with disabilities have continued to be underrepresented in both the special education and general education literature, it is very significant that this dissertation research targets this student population. Further, the intention to uncover what lies beneath school pedagogy, which may have caused an inappropriate educational imposition upon American Indian students with disabilities, will contribute to the knowledge base of dropout and student engagement literature.

Another dimension of the significance of this study is to challenge the standardized education practice provided for American Indian students with disabilities.

American Indian students have long suffered from a disproportionate representation in special education. Well-documented research has demonstrated that differences between home culture and school culture and learning preferences are more likely to contribute to students' school and social failure among American Indian students and may further influence the probability of being identified with a disability (Greenbaum 1985; Ingalls, Hammond, Dupoux, & Baeza, 2006). Researching the challenge students encounter from their perspective can assist us to understand if current standardized education practices have played a suppressive role, not a supporting role. That can assist education professionals and policymakers who work with the American Indian student population to have a better understanding and more accurate interpretation of how to support them to be successful in their learning, which is very likely reflected in their student engagement level.

### **Limitations**

This dissertation, while investigating a critical issue in special education pertaining to a multidirectional relationship among self identity, learning needs, and student engagement under a social-cultural lens, is limited in scope. There are three major limitations to this study: transferability, researcher bias, and reflexivity.

Due to the fact that this student population is underrepresented in the literature, the number of participants in this dissertation may only account for a possibility of the researched phenomenon. As this research is designed under the cultural context of Robeson County and surrounding counties where Lumbee Indians mainly reside, the results of this study may not be transferrable to other Lumbee Indian students with

disabilities in other communities. Lincoln and Guba (1985) indicated that the researcher has to argue whether the research finding will be useful in similar situations or with similar research questions. However, this dissertation research is designed specifically to integrate the history of the studied student population in the local community, which is very unique to research participants. Although this research methodology may be used in other population with similar research questions, the unique history of these participants may affect the research. Therefore, the degree of transferability is jeopardized.

Researcher bias is another limitation to this study. Maxwell (2005) specifies that qualitative study is about how a particular researcher recognizes how his/her values and expectations influence the way research findings are being presented and interpreted. Although I have explored the history of Lumbee Indians for awhile and been able to make connections with my own experiences from a culturally diverse perspective, the language and cultural differences between me, as a researcher, and participants may have an influence on our relationship building and communicating process. Maxwell (2005) also indicates that the validity of qualitative research is about integrity, which is about the degree personal communication can deepen. This is the second major limitation to this dissertation research.

Reflexivity is also a major limitation to this study. Hammersley and Atkinson (1995) point out that the researcher is part of what she studies and always has an influence on interviewee she is trying to understand. Due to the fact that interview will be a major data collection method in this dissertation research, the questioning skills and way of representing researcher's perspective may highly influence the answers obtained



from participants. As a novice researcher, this may be another major limitation to this dissertation study.

### **Summary**

This chapter serves as the foundation of this dissertation study. The background of this study, research problem, purpose statement, and significance of the study are explained in this chapter to give the rationale for why conducting this dissertation study is critical. Because this study adopts knowledge from different research fields, explanations of various terminology and concepts are necessary, which are provided in this chapter. Limitations of this study are also identified in this chapter.

## **CHAPTER II**

### **A REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

#### **A Historical Perspective on American Indian and Lumbee Indian Education**

No Child Left Behind (NCLB), which is the first federal legislation to hold schools accountable for student performance, put great emphasis on improving student achievement, particularly for minority and disadvantaged students. However, American Indians/Alaska Natives with disabilities have continually been reported as having the highest dropout rates and achievement gaps as well as greater representation in special education programs among all student groups for whom data are gathered (U.S. Department of Education, 2002; U.S. Department of Education, 2009).

A 2000 Census special report showed that American Indians and Alaska Natives represent 1.5 percent of the total US population (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010). Surprisingly, North Carolina has the largest American Indian population east of Mississippi, approximately 1.5 percent of the North Carolina total population (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2009). Given the impact of the Indian Removal Act of 1830, very few Indian tribes survived it and stayed in the east. Among those who did, the Lumbee Indians have lived a unique history and preserved their culture more successfully than any other American Indian tribes in the state of North Carolina and on the reservation. Their education history is a great example of how

education and the power of the mainstream culture play a critical role resulting in a continual struggle for ethnic minority students. Lumbee Indians were establishing their own Indian school during the segregation period and were once being reported as staying in school longest and having a higher academic achievement level in the segregation period (Peck, 1972). Although they were also affected by the national context of Indian education, they were producing many well-educated professionals including doctors, lawyers, and teachers. However, Lumbee Indian students, particularly those who are identified with a disability, are struggling under school practices after the civil right movement and desegregation. In order to understand the dropout phenomenon among Lumbee Indian students with and without disabilities at a deeper level, it is important to explore from an historical perspective on the history of American Indian education and Lumbee Indian education.

### **History of American Indians and American Indian Education**

As the history of American Indians underwent a huge change after Europeans discovered the continent of America, it is crucial to explore American Indians' general and education experiences from their history before proceeding to investigate the dropout phenomenon and the continual struggle experienced by Indian students at school.

#### **Pre Indian Removal Era**

In September 1783, the American Revolution ended when the Treaty of Paris was signed by the British (Josephy, 2002). However, the rights and interests of Indians who reached an earlier agreement with the British were completely ignored in the treaty. The newly formed nation, the United States, claimed political sovereignty and ownership over

Indian lands (Joseph, 2002). Since the United States was bankrupt from the war, the government granted soldiers who fought in the war Indian lands instead of cash. With great resistance from the Indians, the government coerced them into signing treaties to forfeit lands for this purpose (Joseph, 2002). During this period, Indians lost vast resources and often were forced to live on small reservations.

In this era, Indian tribes were still considered separate nations; therefore, education facilities and services were provided under the provision of negotiated treaties (Wright, Hurlinger, & England, 1998). The major purpose of education then was to promote Christianity and further civilize American Indians. However, American Indians still possessed sovereignty over their education. This changed with the passage of the Indian Appropriation Act passed in 1871.

### **Indian Removal Era**

In the early nineteenth century, the great Indian nations of the South, composed of the Cherokees, Choctaws, Chickasaws, and Creeks, were torn between maintaining traditional identities and acculturating to the white social structure. At the time, what currently is known as the southern states (except Texas) were all their territory (Moore, 1951). Gradually, they learned a great deal from whites and started to construct their own schools and governments, and they developed an agricultural economy. The four nations along with the Seminoles soon became known as the Five Civilized Tribes. However, Americans still coveted the land and resources that belonged to the Indians.

The controversy between the United States and the great Indian nations of the South started from the Treaty of Indian Springs first signed in 1821 and then re-signed by

1825 when the state of Georgia dealt with Creek Indians on land purchasing (Stewart, 2006). However, not all Creeks agreed with the land merchandise. Some Creek leaders complained that they did not agree with the treaty and white settlers were occupying their land (Stewart, 2006). After President John Quincy Adams, who was elected in 1824, conducted an investigation on the issue, he voided the treaty of Indian Springs. That caused the anger for Georgia governor George Troup, and he claimed that he would send soldiers to force the Creek out of their land. The controversy continued and influenced the policy climate which became hostile in late 1820s to 1830s.

President Adams lost his support in the south because of his stance in supporting Creek Indians in this incident, and therefore Andrew Jackson got elected in 1828. The stance of the federal government was quickly shifted to not viewing American Indians as a sovereign nation and seeing removal of American Indians from the south as the only option (Stewart, 2006). And then in 1829, gold was discovered on Cherokee lands. The federal government and the State of Georgia forced the Cherokee to give up those lands. Even though the Cherokee appealed the issue to the Supreme Court, it was difficult to fight the national climate at the time (Rheynier & Eden, 2004). President Jackson's Indian Removal Act was passed in Congress on May 28, 1830. Although the act was supposed to be voluntary, observers knew that it would lead to involuntary Indian removal (Garrison, 2002; Stewart, 2006). Indian nations in the north as in the South could not escape the removal policy, and many nations between the Ohio River and the Great Lakes were forced to move west of the Mississippi River (Josephy, 2002; Stewart, 2006), during this era.

Research indicates that the Indian Removal was the consequence of power conflicts related to economic and political interests (Garrison, 2002). Due to the fact that many scholars and scientists continued to report evidence of the inferiority of nonwhites and to make heredity arguments with implications for marriage and reproduction, some politicians' claim concerning white people's right to take away Indians' lands received great support at the time (Garrison, 2002; Waller, 2001). As a result, the Indian Removal Act was justified as valid legislation and was carried out without humane consideration for Indians.

Although many historians argue that the removal policy was perceived at the time as a better solution to resolve ongoing conflicts and to protect both white people and Indians, and President Jackson had no better options under given circumstances (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). It is clear to see that the development of Indian policies was based on how to protect the interests of white settlers and assimilate American Indians into white dominant culture. This stance of the federal government in acculturation of American Indians remained the same for several decades, and it can be easily demonstrated by examining education policies pertaining to American Indians during that time. Although Indian tribes were still perceived as separate nations, many people came to take the position to believe that it was appropriate to use aggressive means to "*civilize*" American Indians.

### **Boarding School for Indian Youths**

After the Indian Appropriation Act of 1871, Indian tribes were considered to belong to the United States. So noted in the earlier discussion of stance of US

government was cultural assimilation (Trujillo & Alston, 2005). The education agenda for American Indians was established on the premise that American Indians should be “*civilized*” and schools were seen as a mechanism for a more successful and efficient civilization (Adams, 1995).

Ever since Indian tribes were considered to belong to the United States, the fundamental stance of the federal government had always been cultural assimilation (Trujillo & Alston, 2005; Cobb, 2000; Fuchs & Havinghurst, 1973; Spring, 2001). However, evidence suggests that such policies implemented from 1871 to 1920s caused great suffering and discontent for American Indians and gradually led them into poverty and a lower quality of life (Reyhner & Eder, 2004). Off-reservation boarding school was a great example of cultural assimilation through practicing assimilationist education (Gibson, 1982; Trennert, 1982).

In 1879, Richard Pratt opened an Indian off-reservation boarding school, which served as a model for off-reservation boarding schools for Indian education policymakers (Trennert, 1980). In this model, the main objectives were to fully assimilate Indian students into Anglo-American culture and produce individuals with vocational skills to serve the society. With these priorities, native languages were prohibited at the school, and students were isolated from tribal cultures (Gibson, 1982; Trennert, 1988). Eventually, the Dawes Act, also referred as the General Allotment Act and passed in 1887, incorporated this school model into policy and started a great wave of destruction of Indian cultures (Trennert, 1988). Since many Indian students in these schools reported a desire to return to the reservation, many of those attending federally supported tribal

programs reported experiences of physical and emotional abuse, harsh discipline, and hard labor (Cobb, 2000; Dial H. K., 2006; Fuchs & Havinghurst, 1973; Spring, 2001). Although the school's assimilation was not quite successful (Coleman, 1993), the assimilation movement continued until 1930s (Cobb, 2000), and it caused immeasurable damage to Indian culture, traditions, tribalism, and cultural identity.

### **Lewis Merriam Report and Indian Reorganization Act**

In 1928, Lewis Merriam published a report titled as *The Problem of Indian Administration* that revealed several critical issues pertaining to American Indians, including health, living conditions, economic conditions, education, and suffering as well as discontent and poverty (Merriam, 1928). The report soon captured the attention of the general public, and it led to discussion about whether the federal government should change its assimilationist policy. Finally, in 1934 Congress passed the Indian Reorganization Act, returning authority to tribal leadership and assisting Indian tribes to build their own governments and schools (Indian Reorganization Act, 1934). This act restored the rights of managing assets to American Indians, provided legal support to the reconstruction of a sound economic system at the reservation, and allowed tribes to build their own governments.

### **Indian Termination Act of 1953**

However, the attitude of the US congress shifted once again back to intolerance when it passed the *Termination Act of 1953*. A government report was released, clearly indicating that the goal of Indian education was to assimilate Indian youths to become Americans (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2001). Instead of following up



previous policy to assist American Indians to reconstruct their tribal education and cultural identity, this termination act intended to assimilate Indian students into mainstream society. Thus, services and funding were again withdrawn from Indian tribes and their federal recognitions also were terminated, thus signaling a return to the approach of cultural assimilation toward Indian education. Funding was not reinstated until 1972 when the Indian Education Act was passed in the Congress.

To fulfill the purpose of assimilation, American Indians were forced to leave the reservation and move to the city, and approximately 12,000 tribal members lost their tribal affiliations (Montana Office of Public Instruction, 2001). However, only a few employment opportunities with affordable living wages were available for American Indians. The consequence was an increasing poverty rate of urban Indians. Another negative impact was transferring traditional Indian culture and languages to the next generation.

### **Self-Determination Era**

Finally, the civil rights movement led Indians into a new era, one of self-determination. As the civil rights movement was initiated by African Americans' advocating their legal rights for public facilities, public education, and working opportunities, tribal leaders and Indians also were trying to assert their legal rights and gain back their sovereignty over their tribes. Starting with the Kennedy administration in the early 1960s, federal programs finally included Indian tribes as eligible for federal support (McCoy, 2005).

The Indian Education Act of 1972 was a very important policy related to education funding and resources for American Indian students. This was the response related to several issues relating to documented challenges in meeting cultural and linguistic needs of American Indians in education that had been mentioned in the Kennedy Report (Office of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2003). It finally gave decision making power concerning Indian education programs back to tribes. In 1975, Congress finally passed the Indian Self-Determination Assistance Act of 1975, and this legislation returned the authority to tribal government, and further, it removed the control from the federal government. Unlike before, now tribal government had the authority to play a decision making role in Indian education. This was the first time in American history that policymakers learned to address the challenge of Indian education from an Indian perspective.

Over subsequent decades, additional legislation further confirmed the stance of federal government toward Indian education. In 1990, the Native American Language Act was passed in Congress to encourage state and tribal government in developing tribal language and culture programs, since they firmly believed that using child's first language could benefit their learning (Native American Language Act, 1990). An executive order of 1998, a presidential document concerning American Indian and Alaska Native education, not only stipulated the requirement of consulting American Indian Tribes before devising Indian policy, it also affirmed that the federal government should assist tribal governments to address the educational needs of American Indian students (McCoy, 2005). These recent developments have prompted many researchers and

policymakers to examine issues emerging from Indian education more carefully. Finally, the voice of American Indians could be heard in the decision-making process of federal Indian policy in the late 1990s and changing a long history of Indians in only a recipient role.

### **History of the Lumbee Indians and Their Education Practices**

Although many American Indian and Alaska Native tribes share a similar history, for the Lumbee Indians, it was a slightly different. Because of their appearances, language, white ancestors, and geographic location, they were able to escape the Indian removal disaster. However, they still could not escape from the fate of being oppressed because of their Indian heritage. This section will detail the history of the local Lumbee tribe of the state of North Carolina. Due to the fact that Lumbee Indians made great efforts to establish their own schools to maintain Indian culture and identity, their education history will be discussed in this section as well.

#### **Early History of Lumbee Indians**

Lumbee Indians are a state-recognized American Indian tribe of North Carolina (Lumbee Tribe of North America, 2007). They reside mostly in southeastern North Carolina including Robeson, Hoke, Cumberland, and Scotland counties. Robeson County has the largest population of Lumbees and is considered their homeland. U.S. Census Bureau (2008) data suggests that there are approximately forty-eight thousand Native Americans living in this area.

For years, the origin of the Lumbee Indians was in great debate. Because of their mixture with white and black people, they were not considered to be truly Indians

because they did not have “pure” Indian blood. Blu (1980) suggested that Lumbee Indians challenged several sociological and anthropological assumptions about how a cultural group maintains itself, such as possessing a distinct culture including language, customs, and arts. Very early in their history, the Lumbee Indians adopted English as their language and incorporated some English customs such as farming, wearing beards, owning slaves, and attending religious services (McMillan, 1888; Dial, 2006).

Following the American Revolutionary War, Lumbee Indians were identified in the census of American citizens as *all free persons not white* (Barton, 1967). Most Lumbee students attended subscription schools (McPherson, 1915), schools students attended at the expense of their families (McPherson, 1915; Dial, 2006). However, the situation deteriorated with the passage of a revision of the North Carolina Constitution. The North Carolina Constitution of 1835 denied Lumbees’ right to vote and officially denied them public education. It classified Lumbee Indians as African Americans (Connor, 1908). The label of *free persons of color* replaced the term *all free persons not white*. The emergence of this label is evidence of an effort to eliminate the Lumbee Indian identity and to assimilate them into the mainstream society as an inferior people (Barton, 1967), similar to what occurred to other Indian tribes. Lumbee Indians struggled to save their identity within the dichotomy of the white-black caste system of that time. After the North Carolina Constitution of 1835 was enacted, their Indian ethnicity was legislatively denied to them.

Due to the fact that Lumbee Indians spoke an English dialect and lived in a style similar to Europeans, they were treated as equals and able to be landowners at the time,

which was very different from their Indian brothers (Padget, 1997). In the Revolutionary War, some Lumbees served in the military and sided with the colonists when other Indians sided against them (Dial & Eliades, 1975). The participation in the war allowed them to receive land grants, pensions, or other property. As a result, their landowner status protected them from Indian Removal Act.

During Indian Removal era, Lumbee Indians were the few of them who survived from the aggressive racial discriminations and Indian removal actions. However, even though they had the protection under landowner status, the accentuated racial discrimination toward African and other non-whites were gradually influencing their life significantly (Padget, 1997).

### **Lumbees' Advocacy for Separate Indian School Establishment**

After the Civil War, the state constitution was revised again to provide education for colored children (Butler, 1916; Chavis, 1986; Dial, 2006). With this policy, Lumbee Indian students were forced to go to segregated schools for black students and they often refused. Thus, the lack of Indian schools resulted in Lumbee children's typically receiving no education (Butler, 1916); they were not allowed to attend white schools and they refused to attend "colored" schools because that was not their racial identity.

The context for Lumbee Indians eventually was changed by some of their white friends. Under the influence of Hamilton McMillan, an act to provide separate schools for the Croatan Indians (Which was another name for Lumbee Indians) in Robeson County was passed in the General Assembly of North Carolina in 1885 (Barton, 1967). This was the first legislation passed in North Carolina to provide educational

opportunities for Indian students. Additionally, Lumbee Indians also were recognized as an Indian tribe by the state under the name of Croatan Indians (An Act to Provide for Separate Schools, 1885). Lumbee Indians thus gained the first official recognition of their Indian status, and they were given resources to educate their children.

However, the funds allocated for Indians to construct separate schools were not sufficient. Butler (1916) indicated that the bill only provided \$500 for founding a separate Indian school, and so the Lumbee Indians initiated their first petition to the U.S. Congress for recognition and assistance in 1888 (Lumbee Tribe of North America, 2007). Since the Lumbee, then known as the Croatan Indians, had never signed treaties with the federal government, Congress was not aware of their existence until this petition. Eventually, their request for additional funding was denied by Congress, citing limited resources as the reason (Butler, 1916). Yet, the Lumbee community itself raised additional funds to support the separate Indian School, named the Croatan Normal School. It was built in 1887.

Due to the fact that no schools existed for Indian students from 1835 to 1887, the illiteracy rate among Lumbee Indians had become extremely high. Thompson (1973) noted that very few Lumbee Indians had enough education to teach others. Therefore, the school board of Croatan Normal School hired white teachers to teach Indian children and put Indian teacher training as the top priority for the Normal School.

In the early years of the Croatan Normal School, Lumbee Indians had absolute control. Different from federally supported tribal education administered by Bureau of

Indian Affairs (BIA), the Normal School did not play a role in the assimilation of Indians. Instead, it helped Lumbee Indians preserve their cultural identity.

The Normal School provided a completely different set of experiences for Lumbee Indians, and it produced graduates who were competitive in American society. In the early 1930s, college work was offered at the Normal School (Thompson, 1973). In the 1940s, it was redesigned as a college for Indians and was named as Pembroke State College. From 1940 to 1953, Pembroke was the only state funded four-year college for Indians in the United States (Thompson, 1973). School was considered by Lumbee Indians an important mean to protect and maintain their cultural identity.

The Lumbee Indian's stance in supporting Indian schools could be observed from their decision to exclude African American from attending their schools when they were forced to attend to the same school with African American during the segregation period (Blu, 1980). Dial and Eliades (1975) argued that the single Lumbee separate school was created for Indian students as a way of protecting their Indian heritage. Under white oppression, they discriminated against African Americans to protect their cultural identity. That led to a complicated situation when civil right movement occurred and school desegregation was enforced in 1960s. As expected, Lumbee Indians did not support the civil right movement like other tribes. They were afraid that they would lose control over their own education system and thus jeopardize their cultural identity and Indian heritage.

### **Issue of Federal Recognition**

The Lumbee have struggled for federal recognition for centuries. This is a central issue for the tribe. When federal recognition can be achieved, it is a primary way for

Indian groups to retain their cultural identity and to access resources for their people. When the Indian Termination Act was passed in 1953 and the federal government once again adopted the approach of cultural assimilation, the impact on Lumbee Indians was huge. This act withdrew all funding and resources from all American Indian tribes, including the Lumbee (Dial, 2006). More importantly, they were in the process of receiving federal recognition and the process was terminated by this act.

Federal recognition for Indian tribes after the 1870s started to have a different meaning than simply recognizing existence (McCulloch & Wilkins, 1995). The federal government not only acknowledged the tribe's sovereignty over their land, but it also provided resources such as educational and medical services for tribe members. Lumbee Indians were recognized by name only in the 1956 Lumbee Recognition Act, but they were not able to benefit from any typical federal programs because of their status as not-legally-recognized (McCulloch & Wilkins, 1995). The reason for this struggle is the Lumbee Indians' controversial origin (Padget, 1997; Blu, 1980). Based on the Lost Colony theory which is most commonly noted as the logical origin of Lumbees, they originally were intermixed with the Hatteras and other Indians (Blu, 1980). However, federal recognition requires proof of Indian origins so they can be officially recognized. As a result, their intermixed background was perceived as not having a pure Indian blood eligible for federal recognition. Additionally, two other concerns were cited by opponents: a) the violation of standard federal recognition review process and b) additional allocations of federal aid for Lumbees through Indian Health Service (IHS) and the Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA). Therefore, Lumbee Indians failed to receive



federal recognition continually. In order to receive resources to improve their quality of education, medical care and other needed services, the Lumbees have appealed to the Congress to rescind the 1956 Lumbee Recognition Act.

The fact of the Lumbee Indians' long history of not being recognized as a tribe accounts for the insufficient resources and support available for them. The history of Lumbee Indian education cannot be separated from their seeking recognition from the federal government and the State of North Carolina.

### **School Desegregation Impact on Lumbee Indians**

Although the civil right movement brought equity and more resources to ethnic minority students, including Lumbee Indians, through school desegregation, research indicates that desegregation had significant negative impact on Lumbee Indian students (Dial, 2006).

In terms of the benefits of school desegregation, research suggests that more resources, supplies, and funding were received by integrated schools compared to the time prior desegregation (Dial, 2006). During the segregation period, the community was the major source for school resources and supplies. Although the state of North Carolina agreed to let Lumbee Indians build their own school, insufficient resources and funds were provided (Thompson, 1973; Dial, 2006). Therefore, students had more course selections and teachers at the integrated school. However, the cost of school desegregation may have a greater impact on Lumbee Indian students than other students along four dimensions: community ties, teacher-student relationships, identity, and curriculum preparation.

## **Community Ties**

School was the center of the Indian community during the segregation period. Parents, school administrators, and teachers as well as tribal leaders and community members were together constructing Lumbee ideals, beliefs, history, and culture together (Dial, 2006; Sider, 1993). During the desegregation period, however, community ties became very critical for schooling experiences of Lumbee Indians (Dial, 2006). Lumbee Indian students were sent to integrated schools that were no longer the center of the community. In fact, Lumbee Indian students often were bused to schools far away from their home, and most teachers were not familiar with their Indian heritage or their community (Dial, 2006). The tie between the community and the school was broken down by the school desegregation policy. Parents also reported that they visited school less compared to when their children were in Indian schools (Chavis, 1986). The role the school used to play as a cultural and political agency for Lumbee Indians was changed. Students were required to assimilate themselves into the Anglo-American culture, as it was the mainstream culture in integrated schools. Even though Lumbee Indians were once reported to have highest educational attainment among all Indian tribes in the nation, they failed to have strong academic performance after integration (Chavis, 1986; Dial, 2006).

## **Teacher-Student Relationships**

Due to the fact that Indian teachers were usually important members of the community, the way Indian teachers defined their roles and responsibilities was very different than teachers in integrated schools. An Indian teacher was described as an

influential role model and played an important role in envisioning career alternatives for Lumbee Indian students (Dial, 2006). Given the fact that the major occupation before the 1960s for Lumbee Indians was farming before 1960s, some parents may not have valued education much as it did not help their children to develop better farming skills (Fuchs & Havinghurst, 1973). Instead of using various means to force students stay at school, Indian teachers chose to accommodate the individual needs and interests of each student (Chavis, 1986). For example, these teachers used home visits to help them understand each student in depth (Dial, 2006).

A very critical difference between the perceived roles and responsibilities of Indian teachers and teachers in integrated schools was whether they viewed teaching as a mean of knowledge delivery or a means to produce a successful and confident individual. Indians utilized their expertise to support the learning of Lumbee Indian students and motivate them to improve their quality of life through education. Many study participants in one research study reported that Indian teachers placed great value on education and had very high expectations for their academic achievement, because they believed education was the only way to improve their quality of life (Dial, 2006).

Research also indicates that a major factor determining the quality of teacher-student relationship is communication (Knapp & Vangelisti, 2000). Chavis (1986) indicated that teachers in integrated schools tended to misinterpret the behaviors of Lumbee students and ethnic minority students more frequently received discipline actions such as being sent to a “time-out” room. The phenomenon suggests that the communication between teachers and Lumbee Indian students in integrated school was

not well-established, and the role expectations of the teacher differed between teachers and students. This situation was further confirmed in recent research conducted by Dial (Dial, 2006). Therefore, students in Indian schools during the segregation period were receiving appropriate support from their Indian teachers, an important element of successful school practice as described in the education literature (Reschly & Christenson, 2006).

### **Identity**

Identity was an important challenge students had to face after desegregation. Students in Pembroke and Robeson county did not have many experiences of racial discrimination even after desegregation, since Indians still remained the majority in the community, including school (Dial, 2006). However, Lumbee Indian students observed the unequal treatment in terms of services provided for white students and non-white students. For example, the schools provided a bus for white students, but not for Indian and black students (Dial, 2006). Therefore, they experienced firsthand the system of oppression and discrimination, even in a school where they were a majority.

### **Curriculum**

Ramsey, Williams and Vold (2003) define curriculum as a collection of activities coming from the view of teachers who design and implement it in the classroom. A multicultural curriculum puts an emphasis on how teachers play a role in the curriculum implementation, which is often the interplay of teacher awareness, curriculum content, and available curricular resources (William, 1996; Ramsey, Williams, & Vold, 2003). For example, in a lesson, teachers usually play an active role to presenting prepared

instructional resources and managing an environment to allow interaction between students and the teacher. As a result, whether teachers who design the curriculum possess sufficient cultural knowledge of their students may have a great impact on learning.

In terms of the curriculum for Indian schools, all schools at the time adopted the same materials in all subjects. Pember (2008) suggests that Indian students did not respond well to traditional Western instruction because of their way of knowing. Indian students tended to focus on the process of learning, which meant that they usually learned better when teachers used stories and the community culture to engage them. Indian teachers were key characters in the Lumbee community and possessed both the knowledge and expertise for developing appropriate materials to reflect their culture and identity. Since they were knowledgeable of the learning preferences of Indian students, they were able to provide materials integrating these preferences and Lumbee community culture.

Another special characteristic of Lumbee teachers was their tendency to share materials and collaborate with each other in designing learning curriculum. Lumbee Indians tended to shared resources and had mutual cooperation with each other (Chavis, 1986). This tendency may have resulted from their farming life because of the need to share resources and labor for growing crops in a swampy area, and then may have carried over to Lumbee Indian education. As Indian teachers incorporated their knowledge about each individual student, Lumbee culture, and family background, the curriculum they

designed seemed more accessible than the one provided in the integrated school based on a performance report at the time (Chavis, 1986).

Given all the challenges faced by Lumbee Indian students after school desegregation, the impact on students' school performance was not surprising, particularly attendance figures. Even though the attendance of Lumbee Indian students was influenced by families' valuing school, school enrollment and attendance was still on the rise during the school segregation period (Thompson, 1973). However, after the policy of school desegregation was enforced, Lumbee Indian students' school attendance, school completion, and dropout issue have deteriorated. Even in Robeson and surrounding counties, Lumbees' home community, these issues are still critical and need to be addressed further.

### **Impact of the Indian Education Act of 1972**

Indian Education Act of 1972 led Lumbee Indian education into a new era. Because Lumbee Indians are recognized by *name* only, they were not able to receive any further resources designated for Indian tribes. However, the Indian Education Act of 1972 provided Lumbee Indians a different avenue to receive federal funding. Part A of Indian Education Act specifies that the recipient of federal funding can be both local education agencies (LEAs) and tribal schools on a per-pupil basis (Department of Education Organization Act, 1980). Therefore, they can access funding for Indian students through their local education agencies. This was the first time Lumbee Indian students could access federal funding in terms of their Indian student status.

The Indian Education Act of 1972 also changed the nature of Indian education tremendously. This was the first time legislation on Indian education specifically addressed the importance of avoiding posing any education agenda without placing Indian desires and wishes as a priority (Department of Education Organization Act, 1980). As the Elementary and Secondary Act of 1965 was passed to provide more specific services for students with special needs, the Indian Education Act of 1972 was also the first legislation specifically addressing the special needs of Indian students. This legislation brought the attention of education professionals working with Indian students to the population of students with special needs.

### **Current Status of American Indian Students**

Since Lumbee Indian students were once very successful in school, it is critical to know how they are performing today, particularly after 40 years of school integration. American Indians on reservations suffered for more than a century, and it may take them more time and effort to reconstruct a culture-supported environment for educating Indian students. But Lumbee Indians were able to preserve their Indian identity more successfully through Indian school advocacy during the segregation period. If the current generation of Lumbee Indian students was not able to escape a fate similar to other Indian students, even in Robeson and surrounding counties where Indian students have received appropriate support from integrated school practices, then current education practice may play a very critical role in affecting the school performance of Indian students. What current schooling may have provided for Indian students is an inappropriate education, which may further affect student engagement level and an eventual decision to drop out

of school. Therefore, it is necessary to investigate this issue beginning with the current performance of Indian students both at the national and county levels.

### **Overall Performance of American Indian Students**

American Indian students continue to be cited as one of the most at-risk student groups in education, including in the special education literature. The overall performance of Indian students can be examined from several perspectives, including programs and services, representation in special education, and school participation including dropout and graduation rates.

American Indian/Alaska Native students have a higher probability of receiving special education services compared to all other racial groups (Devoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). Approximately 14 % of American Indian/Alaska Native students receive services under Individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) compared to 11% for Black students, 8% for white students, 8% for Hispanic students, and 5% for Asian students. Among all disability categories identified under IDEA, American Indian/Alaska Native students are more likely than white students to be identified as having an emotional disturbance, a learning disability, or an intellectual disability (US Department of Education, 2009). Thus, American Indian/Alaska Native students have a very high concentration in special education programs nationwide.

In terms of school participation, students who are not taking part in school activities usually do not receive the same learning opportunities as those who always participate. However, among all racial and ethnic groups, American Indians/Alaska Native students have been reported to have higher number of absences from school than



African American and white students (Devoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). The suspension rate of American Indian/Alaska Native students is also the second highest among all racial groups, approximately 7.2% from kindergarten to 12<sup>th</sup> grade (Devoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). Their dropout rate is also the highest among all racial/ethnic student groups (Devoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). Referring to American Indian/Alaska Native students with disabilities, the dropout rate is even higher, approximately 48% in 2007 (US Department of Education, 2008). Given the fact that American Indian /Alaska Native students are disproportionately represented in special education and show lower rates of school participation, it is clear that their school achievement and education attainment are likely not strong compared to other student groups.

Research has indicated that the percentage of American Indian/Alaska Native students who receive a bachelor degree or pursue graduate degree is the lowest among all student groups (Devoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). This result also has affected the unemployment rate of American Indian/Alaska Native students, it is the highest among all racial/ethnic groups (Devoe & Darling-Churchill, 2008). That is, many of American Indian/Alaska Native students do not find a high-income job.

### **Current Status of Lumbee Indian Students with/without Disabilities**

In North Carolina, the school performance of Indian students is consistent with national findings, which means that Indian students exhibit a lower school completion rate and disproportionate representation in special education and among high school dropouts (North Carolina Department of Public Instruction, 2009). The NCDPI annual report (2009) indicates that American Indian students have the highest dropout rate in the

state at 6.99%, compared to 6.92% for Hispanic students, 5.95% for black students, and 4.97% for all students (NCDPI, 2009). Although the report suggests a decline in dropout rates across all ethnic student groups, American Indians still remain most at-risk at dropping out of school (NCDPI, 2009).

American Indian high school students also were reported as having highest crime rate followed by black and white students (NCDPI, 2008). The report also suggests that black and American Indian students, ninth graders who just enter high school, and students with disabilities have the highest percentage of suspensions among all student groups (NCDPI, 2008). Due to the fact that American Indian students and students with disabilities both have been reported as at-risk for suspension, this may further affect their schooling experiences and learning opportunities. It is a reasonable assumption that Indian students with disabilities in North Carolina face a greater challenge in school compared to other student groups.

Referring to the performance of Indian students in Robeson County, the achievement gap is not as wide as in other counties (NCDPI, 2009). However, the average achievement score in English has continued to have a wider gap than the state average (NCDPI, 2008; 2009). Although the dropout rate of Indian students in Robeson county has been improving for the last four years, their graduation rate still is one of the lowest among all racial groups in North Carolina (NCDPI, 2009). Indian students with disabilities appear to encounter greater challenges in school.

## **Challenges for American Indian and Lumbee Indian Students**

Although it is difficult to conclude what accounts for the academic difficulties encountered by Lumbee Indians students with or without disabilities, it is obvious that these students may not be supported appropriately compared to Indian school practice during the segregation period. For Indian students with disabilities, the challenge is even greater because disability is not a term in Indian culture and special education programs for Indian students were constructed after school desegregation (Locklear, 1985).

Understanding of the education of Indian students with disabilities was very limited.

However, Indian culture values individualized instruction and collaboration, and it perceives the child with disability as a gift from God. With these beliefs and values, the child with a disability may have received various types of accommodations in everyday life. For example, Lumbee culture views the child as a whole. When the disability is part of the child, accommodations are naturally provided by any person who is near the child. Therefore, during the Indian school period, the mild special needs of Lumbee Indian student may have been addressed. Thus, very few experiences concerning providing education for Indian students with mild disabilities have been documented. However, when these students entered an institution where school professionals' perception of collaborative culture, individualized instruction, and disability differ from their previous experiences, they may experience more struggles than typically developing students.

Due to the fact that school is an important site where the students' individual identity has gradually developed, different views and beliefs between the individual

student and school professionals may have significant influences on their identity development. Smyth (2006) argues that students in today's society may have to negotiate their identity with a more narrow view identified by the school, as the belief identified by the school can be perceived as the mainstream set of values. As a result, the degree of successful identity negotiation may relatively determine whether the student succeeds in school from his or her perspective. For Lumbee Indian students with disabilities, they need to deal with identity struggles in two different dimensions: cultural identity and disability identity. Therefore, the success story of Indian school practice illustrates that Indian students were able to negotiate their identity with the school identified belief more successfully. This is the reason why we have to explore today's Indian students' disengagement and the dropout phenomenon to a deeper level, especially targeting students with mild disabilities. More importantly, the answers from investigating this phenomenon in an Indian community will contribute to the reform direction for providing culturally supportive education for American Indian students with or without disabilities.

### **Dropout Phenomenon**

In this section, I will provide an overview on dropout policy, dropout characteristics, and research findings related to Culturally Linguistically Diverse (CLD) students with or without disabilities, including the American Indian student population. The purpose is to present rationale for researching this phenomenon focusing on Indian students with disabilities.

## **Dropout Rate and Policy Concerns**

Since the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act was passed in 2001 and enacted in 2002, debates on whether the established education accountability system can meet the goal of improving student outcomes and closing achievement gap among different student groups have continued. Under NCLB, schools are held accountable for student performance, which is mainly measured based by high stakes tests (Dillion & Rotherham, 2007). Since states are allowed to set their standards, define their calculation methods, and develop their own monitoring mechanism for student performance, years of annual reports on dropout rates, graduation rates, and student performance still cannot yeild an accurate national or state picture to serve as the foundation for improving student outcomes. Carvey (2005) suggests that the flexibility to set up state standards has led to a misrepresented reality known to the public. Consequently, states who keep high expectations and set up high standards for students are penalized because they report worse figures compared to other states. Therefore, devising consistent standards and definitions that require all state reports to reflect the reality of student performance is very critical.

Currently, school districts, states, national databases, and independent researchers all use different methods to report dropout rates. The most commonly used calculation methods are event rate, status rate, and cohort rate (Shannon & Balsam, 2006). Event rate is a measure of the proportion of students who drop out in a single year without completing high school and it typically yields the smallest rate (Shannon & Bylsma, 2006). Cohort rate is a measure of what happens to a single group over a period of time,

and it typically yields the largest rate of dropout (Shannon & Bylsma, 2006). Status rate measures the proportion of students who have not completed high school and are not enrolled at a point in time, regardless of when they dropped out. It typically yields a rate that falls between event and cohort rate (Shannon & Bylsma, 2006).

Concerning the dropout rate of students with disabilities, the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) and the Office of Special Education Programs (OSEP) use two different calculations. Although they both use the event rate method, NCES obtains the dropout rate by dividing by the number of students who had enrolled the year before and OSEP divides by the number of students in the same age group (Cataldi, Laird, Kewal, & Ramani, 2009). Because the event method tends to underestimate dropout rate, schools usually prefer to use this method (Kemp, 2004; Lewis, 2004). NCLB requires that states establish a common definition of dropout and collect data on a school-by-school basis (National Center for School Engagement, 2006). However, the policies regarding compulsory education such as age and what defines a dropout still vary state to state. This prevents the national aggregation of state dropout data. Further, it poses difficulty for monitoring the prevalence of the dropout phenomenon. The National Dropout Prevention Center for Students with Disabilities (NDPC-SD) specifically points out the need to standardize dropout definitions and dropout calculation methods (NDPC-SD, 2008). Having a tracking system that monitors both student truancy and student dropout is a first step to help professionals interpret the phenomenon accurately and address the issue appropriately.

In order to get a clear picture of student completion and student dropout, National Center for School Engagement (NCSE) established a mechanism that considers three rates: an excused absence rate (EAR), an unexcused absence rate (UAR), and a habitually truant rate (HTR) (NCSE, 2006). EAR and UAR both use average daily enrollment as the denominator. The nominator is the total days of excused absences for EAR and total days of unexcused absences for UAR. For HTR, the numerator is the total number of students who meet the state statute for habitually truant and the denominator is the average daily enrollment. This formula helps states and school districts monitor student truancy and student attendance. Student truancy is an early indicator of eventual student dropout (Bridgeland, Dilulio & Morison, 2006). Therefore, knowing student truancy can effectively inform professionals of the potential challenges a school faces.

The No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act, set a goal of closing the achievement gap by holding schools accountable for improving academic achievement for all student groups. One important accomplishment of this act is to broaden students' access to high quality instructional practice, including culturally and linguistically diverse students and students with disabilities. However, the emphasis on test scores may create a climate pushing out low-achieving students, particularly minority students such as English language learners, Latino students, African American students, American Indian students, and students with disabilities. Walden and Kritsonis (2008) suggest that many field professionals are concerned about whether such testing-driven accountability systems actually measure students' familiarity of the English language and American culture. Thus, due to a lack of understanding of mainstream language and culture, students maybe

labeled by testing scores; furthermore, they may be misplaced in special education programs or pressured to drop out of school.

NCLB also adds a graduation requirement to accountability sanctions to prevent the push-out phenomenon (Losen, 2004). Yet a review of federal and state accountability implementation points out that the federal does not strictly enforce the provision. Instead, administrators water down the importance of graduation requirements and make test scores are the sole indicator of AYP (Losen, 2004). Research also indicates that this testing-driven accountability system has added to a set of individual or family causes leading to dropout and further creates a highly challenging and alienating school environment for low-achieving students, particularly those who are from minority backgrounds (McNeil, Coppola, Radigan, & Heilig, 2008). For example, for those students who have to work to support their family, they may be at risk of failing the high stake tests. In order to meet AYP requirements, school professionals may take a passive role in accommodating the need of these students, so these students would not affect the overall school performance of the school. As students' family needs cannot be accommodated and school professionals take passive approach to keep them at school, they are very likely to drop out of the school. A research conducting on Chicano/Latino high school students reveals such situation and finds that many school professionals may simply allow students to leave the school, and at the same time students also perceive dropping out of the school as a better decision to make because of their perception of school professionals' attitudes (Davison Avils, Guerrero, Howarth, & Thomas, 1999).



Under such circumstances, the accountability system plays a huge factor contributing to the push-out phenomenon.

### **Most At-risk Student Population**

For several years, the Department of Labor (DOL) has consistently reported that high school dropouts show lower labor participation compared to high school graduates; students who are not enrolled in college also show lower labor force participation rate compared to students who are enrolled in college (US Department of Labor, 2008; 2009). This result clearly implies that receiving a high school diploma and having an education is likely to significantly determine quality of life in today's society. Shannon and Bylsma (2006) suggest that school dropouts tend to face economic crises as well as have limited access to higher education and well-paying job opportunities. As a result, they may eventually require more social services. Thus, it not only affects an individual's quality of life, but also it increases the cost to the society.

Among all CLD student groups, American Indian students face an even bigger challenge under the current school practices, which has also been reflected through their overrepresentation in special education programs. A total of 11.9% of American Indian students age 3 to 21 are served under IDEA compared to 8.6% of all students (US Department of Education, 2008). National data indicate that students with emotional disturbances (ED), specific learning disabilities (SLD), and mental retardation (MR) present the top three highest dropout student group compared to other disability group (US Department of Education, 2008).

Based on the Annual Report of the North Carolina Advisory Council on Indian Education (NCDPI, 2007), American Indian students are more likely than all other student groups to be identified as having a disability, particularly in the category of mild intellectual disability (MID) and emotional disturbance (ED). Furthermore, based on all data reports in recent years, we can conclude that current education practice for American Indian students with disabilities may not be able to support them appropriately and may put them in a disadvantageous position later in life.

### **Student Engagement**

#### **Relationship between Engagement and Dropout Phenomenon**

The connection among student engagement, dropout, and academic achievement has been well-documented in both the high school and college dropout literature (Klem & Connell, 2004; Sinclair, Hurley, Evelo, Christenson, & Thurlow, 2002; Lehr, 2004; Fredricks, Blumenfeld, & Paris, 2004; Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Dalton, Glennie, & Ingels, 2009). Early research indicated that specific academic and social experiences as early as the primary grades may lead students to a gradual disengaging learning process ending with a dropout decision (Alexander, Entwisle, & Horsey, 1997; Finn, 1989; Roderick, & Camburn, 1999). Recent research confirms that student engagement has a crucial relationship to student achievement and student completion across different student groups, including students from ethnic minority backgrounds and students with disabilities (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008; Janosz, Amchabault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008). Klem and Connel (2004) also suggest that a connection exists among engagement, achievement, and school behaviors. This has

been confirmed across various groups, including those who have social and economic advantages or disadvantages. Because dropping out of the school has been conceptualized as a developmental process starting from disengagement with school activities (Finn, 1993; Lear, 2004) and a relationship between dropout and student engagement has been well-documented in the literature, exploring the concept of student engagement is critical in advancing our understanding about the schooling experiences of dropout students.

### **Student Engagement as a Multidimensional Construct**

For years, student engagement has received extensive attention in the dropout research. Although researchers adopt different approaches to investigate student engagement and its influence on student performance, self concept, school completion, and sense of belonging to the school, the consensus that student engagement is a multidimensional construct is well-established in the field (National Research Council, 2004; Harris, 2008; You & Sharkey, 2009; Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009). Students usually have unique schooling experiences based on their interaction with peer, adults, and the overall school context. Ou (2005) supports this argument by suggesting that educational attainment is the outcome of various interactions among students, their peers, families, and the school context. Wenzel (1998) also argues that engagement should be conceptualized as a state of being highly influenced by contextual factors, including interactions between students, and their peers, family, and school environment. Research also confirms that the global school experience of every

individual student is affected by multiple psychological and behavior changes throughout their personal experiences (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009).

Research conducted by Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, and Pagani also confirms the complexity of the student engagement construct and a decision-making process leading to dropout. This research noted that some students who have shown relatively stable engagement, such as attending school regularly, surprisingly drop out of the school. The result suggests a complex decision making process by students. Even when students continue to show stable behavior and emotional engagement with school activities, it may not indicate that these students are not at risk of dropping out of the school. Student engagement can be perceived as an emerging process influenced by everyday experiences. Further, the psychological state of being usually can be observed from their school engagement level as well as their decision to participate in or withdraw from school related activities. Although observable engaging behaviors should still be taken into account, research has reminded us that behavior engagement may not be a good predictor of student engagement level (Janosz, Archambault, Morizot, & Pagani, 2008).

Even though the consensus on the multidimensional construct of engagement has been established in the field, perspectives on multidimensionality vary (Appleton, Christenson, & Furlong, 2008). Anderson, Christen, Sinclair, and Lehr (2004) divide student engagement into four dimensions: behavioral, academic, cognitive, and psychological. Due to the fact that many other researchers may perceive academic engagement similar to behavior engagement, they distinguish these two engagement dimensions by the types of activities they are engaged with. Harris (2008) suggests that

student engagement can be divided into behavior, psychological, and cognitive, and she posits a hierarchical relationship among these three types of construct. Finn (1989) also suggests that a student engagement model is hierarchical and links behavioral, psychological, and cognitive dimensions. However, Fredericks, Blumenfeld, and Paris (2004) indicate that behavior engagement, affective engagement, and cognitive engagement are three major dimensions of the student engagement construct and that they all represent important aspects of students' schooling experiences.

Although different dimensions of a student engagement construct are proposed by various researchers, behavior engagement, psychological engagement, and cognitive engagement generally are mentioned by all of them. Behavior engagement usually refers to student conformity to school rules and student involvement as well as participation in school-related or extracurricular activities (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Harris, 2008; Furlong & Christenson, 2008). Affective engagement usually refers to student feelings and attitudes toward the school as well as a sense of belonging and connectedness to it (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, and Pagani, 2009; Furlong & Christenson, 2008). Harris (2008) defines psychological engagement as being interested in and enjoying participation in what happens in school as well as being motivated and confident in participation. Both affective and psychological engagement constructs discuss the concepts of student feelings, student attitudes, and emotional connection with the school. Cognitive engagement concerns student psychological involvement in learning such as perceptions of competency and autonomy as well as willingness to engage with effortful learning and meet task-oriented goals, even when students are not

interested in the class materials (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Furlong & Christenson, 2008; Harris, 2008; Reeve, 2006).

Additionally, some researchers propose that the level of student engagement reflects whether or not students are willing to engage with the constructed cultural practice at school (Zyngier, 2007; Smyth, 2006). Zyngier (2007) proposes that some teachers perceive school as where students learn how to fit into the society. As a result, student engagement becomes defined as whether students are engaged with learning to master the cultural practice constructed by the school. Due to the fact that current school practice has been established based on the mainstream Caucasian culture and value system, the marginalization experienced by students with ethnic as well as disability background is not far from expected. Their marginalization can be observed from dropout and school completion reports where students from ethnic backgrounds and those with disabilities tend to present poor school performance compared to all students or the Caucasian student group (Dalton, Glennie, & Ingels, 2009). Research examining student engagement level in the general student population has suggested that a good portion of the student population has experienced disengagement with school related activities (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Yazzie-Mintz, 2007). With all these research results, we may assume that student disengagement may be influenced by the gap in values between the school and the student. When the gap of cultural differences is not addressed effectively, constant occurrence of student disengaging behaviors are not surprising.

Although student engagement has been defined in many different ways in different studies, the essence of student engagement is about whether students are able to connect with the culture practiced within the school community. Harris (2008) has argued that the critical concept of student engagement is not only about how students participate in school-related activities, but also about student experiences at school. Based on a synthesis generated from student engagement literature, *student engagement* can be defined as a continual decision making process of every individual student in everyday life, and the process is strongly influenced by multidimensional psychological experiences related to intrinsic motivation, self perception, and a perceived relationship with peers, school professionals, and the surrounding school environment.

### **Influential Factors to Student Engagement**

Due to the fact that student engagement level can be influenced by intrinsic motivation, self-perception, and interpersonal relationship, and all of these three factors are related to each other, this discussion will focus on these three dimensions and explore literature on the interconnected relationship among them.

Intrinsic motivation often is mentioned in the cognitive engagement literature and is usually identified as having a crucial influence on student engagement level (Reeve, 2006; Zyngier, 2007; Harris, 2008; Archambault, Janosz, Morizor, & Pagani, 2009). According to the dialectical framework of self-determination theory, a student's inner motivation has a dynamically interactive relationship with his/her surrounding classroom influences (Reeve, Deci, & Reeve, 2004). As students may express their inner motivation in many different ways, including seeking support for autonomy-supportive

learning in the classroom, how classroom practice is constructed by teachers or school professionals may have an important impact on student engagement level. In Zyngier's (2007) study, students reported less engagement in secondary schools compared to when they were in primary schools, and major reasons for their lower engagement were disengaged teachers, disengaged students, and unchallenging school work. Therefore, student inner motivation may be negatively affected by a disengaged school practice characterized by lower motivation of both teachers and students, as well as a poor teacher-student relationship. Reeve (2006) further indicates that classroom practice can either support or frustrate the expression of students' inner motivation which can facilitate the learning process. Under certain circumstances, students also may start to practice a form of political resistance which carries a different set of values and culture within the school community based on negative beliefs and school experiences (Kanpol, 1997; Hooks, 2003; Zyngier, 2007). Therefore, managing a school environment to nurture students' inner motivation is very critical.

Referring to how inner motivation is influenced by the surrounding environment, the starting point should be the type of engagement most relevant to an inner motivation discussion. According to a self-determination theory dialectical framework, inner motivation refers to the psychological needs and developmental tendencies of every student (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). How such inner motivation influences students is reflected in their actions, which can be viewed as the engagement level determined by the self. While the self is engaging with the learning process to meet psychological needs and developmental tendencies, students also develop their own interests and integrated



values based on interacting with the surrounding environment (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004). Autonomy, competence, and relatedness have been conceptualized as cross-culturally universal psychological needs (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009). As a result, all of these factors interconnect with each other and develop into a unique psychological experience which is constantly influenced by the surrounding environment.

In the cognitive engagement literature, researchers also tend to relate student engagement to student psychological involvement in learning, including a perception of competency and willingness to engage with effortful learning as well as self-regulation of school performance based on the perceived link between school and future life aspiration (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Furlong & Christenson, 2008).

Researchers also suggest that constructing an autonomy-supportive practice, where teachers allow students to make more decisions in the learning process, can assist students to meet their universal psychological needs (Reeve, 2006; Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCintio, & Turner, 2004). Reeve (2006) further clarifies that autonomy-supportive practice requires that teachers make efforts to nurture students' intrinsic motivation based on self action rather than forcing students to accept non-self-determined and socially appropriate types of extrinsic motivation. Additional research also supports the positive impact of autonomy-supported practice on student engagement and student outcomes (Vallerand, Fortier, & Guay, 1997; Deci, Sheinman, & Ryan, 1981; Reeve, Jang, Carrell, Barch, & Jeon, 2004).

In addition to general student engagement level and student outcome, autonomy-supported practice also plays an important role in promoting student self-perception which is reflected in student perceived relatedness with teachers, schools, professionals, and peers (Tucker, Zayco, Herman, Reinke, Trujilo, Carraway, Wallack, & Ivery, 2002). Therefore, students' perception of self and contextual influences may have a significant impact on their feelings of relatedness or connectedness to the school and further affect their engagement level. McMahon, Parnes, Keys, and Viola (2008) suggest that the majority of students tend to redefine their sense of connection to other students and their school based on their schooling experiences. Concerning interpersonal relationships, research indicates that peer relationship quality and support from friends are associated with student engagement and students with disabilities or low socio-economic status tend to be at-risk of dropping out of school (Perdur, Manzeske, & Estell, 2009).

Research also suggests that a sense of belonging and connectedness is a strong indicator of student engagement and school completion (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Aderman, 1999; Wentzel, 1998, 1999; Faircloth & Hamm, 2005). That is, a connectedness to the academic community, including peers and teachers, plays a critical role in keeping students in school (Croniger & Lee, 2001; Gunn, Chorney, & Poulsen, 2009). Therefore, students with lower quality support from interpersonal relationship with peers and teachers may not be able to meet their psychological need in the learning process, and this may further affect their engagement level. Although very limited research targets the direct relationship between autonomy-supported practice and perceived relatedness, particularly among ethnic minority students, students with lower

socio-economic status, or students with disabilities, research has confirmed that the quality of interpersonal relationships may affect students' perceived relatedness and further influence their engagement level.

As self-regulating ability is also perceived to be an important characteristic of students who have higher student engagement levels, how classroom practice or teacher-student relationships nurture students' self-regulating ability becomes an important focus. Research has suggested that self-regulatory ability is critical for school adjustment and students' decision making process for the future (You & Sharkey, 2009). This research further demonstrates that perceived teacher support has a positive relationship with students' future life aspirations and their sense of responsibility. Stefanou, Perencevich, DiCinto, and Turner (2004) found that autonomy-supported practice not only refers to decision making opportunities, but it also is about managing a learning environment for students to engage in independent thinking. This also corresponds to how autonomy-supportive practice can facilitate a critical thinking process combined with decision-making learning processes to further promote cognitive autonomy. As a result, cognitive autonomy has a reciprocal relationship with the self-regulatory ability of the student and further promotes student persistence on tasks and prevents dropout decision making process.

Referring to perceived competence, students who are more engaged with school related activities tend to show a greater level of perceived competence (Hardre & Reeve, 2003). When students' needs to feel competent or self-determined are neglected, they tend to develop a dropout intention. You and Sharkey (2009) also suggest that students

who show high self-esteem and possess a high level of internal control tend to have higher engagement. Because feeling competent suggests that student are able to act responsibly, students' sense of autonomy and competence can facilitate their internal self-regulatory processes.

### **Research Gap**

Based on a review of the student engagement literature review, it is reasonable to conclude that meeting psychological needs in the learning process may be an important approach for engaging students in order to keep them in school. Although much research has targeted whether school practice has successfully supported perceived relatedness, competence, and self-regulatory ability of students, very limited research has analyzed a student population with both cultural diversity and disability. Due to the fact that Lumbee Indian students with disabilities have continued to experience academic difficulties and are overrepresented in special education, it is very likely that the psychological needs of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities may not be adequately supported. Although autonomy, competency, and relatedness are cross-culturally universal psychological needs (Reeve, Deci, & Ryan, 2004; Jang, Reeve, Ryan, & Kim, 2009), no research has investigated autonomy-supportive practice from the perspective of Indian students with disabilities. Therefore, this dissertation research explored the perception of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities concerning whether current school practice has failed to support their psychological needs during the learning process. Further, I identified whether autonomy, relatedness, and competence are perceived as

critical psychological needs of this student population to contribute to the knowledgebase of cross-cultural research on autonomy-supportive practice.

### **Theoretical Foundation**

Student engagement is defined as students' perceived schooling experiences and level of cognitive autonomy as well as level of ownership of the critical learning-thinking process, it is important to understand student perspectives to explore whether the current school system has been practicing oppressive pedagogy, which is not taking students' cognitive autonomy into consideration. The theoretical foundation of this dissertation research is mainly critical pedagogy theory as proposed by Paulo Freier.

Critical pedagogy theory views schooling as *a form of politics*, that is, schooling is a political way to introduce students to a particular form of social life (McLaren, 1994). Given the fact that Lumbee Indian students were successfully supported in the segregated Indian school, the curriculum provided in the Indian school was more accessible for Indian students, because Indian culture was taken into consideration in the lesson designing process (Chavis, 1986). Since the mainstream culture at the Indian school and the community culture both embodied Lumbee culture, school practice was able to protect and maintain the cultural identity of Lumbee Indians.

However, after desegregation, Lumbee Indians lost control of their schools and were forced to adopt an official version of curriculum and school structure. Teachers were required to receive a teacher education credential developed in the Caucasian culture and value system. Although Indian teachers were the second majority teaching force in Robeson county schools, Caucasian culture dominated the value system at school

and gradually developed a different set of values guiding students' expected behaviors. Teachers, especially those who were Lumbee, then played a role in ensuring that Indian students were not be able to be excluded by the system. If students were not able to understand or master this form of culture, it is very easy for them to struggle, not academically but also socially. Although many Indian teachers were trying to prevent Indian children from experiencing challenges at school, they also played a role in introducing Caucasian culture to Indian children through school practices.

Based on Freire's(1998) definition of *schooling*, the power to decide school curriculum and determine a set of socially accepted value system is very critical. In the case of Lumbee Indian students, even though Indian teachers were trying to include their students into the education system, the power to determine school curriculum and *the* culture practice was held by Caucasian. For the purpose to achieve the goal of including Indian students in the education system, Indian teachers had to play a role in introducing Caucasian culture to Indian students. Therefore, when Indian students were unable to master such cultural practice within the school, it is very likely for these students to experience struggles in their schooling experiences. To find a solution to address this issue, Freire (1998) challenged the nature of a teacher-student relationship and the role school played in students' political and social life. Such stance is consistent with my dissertation research; therefore, I chose critical pedagogy as my main theoretical foundation.

Because this research intends to uncover whether students' psychological needs are met in the learning process and further affect their student engagement level, student

perception will be explored under a relational context. A relational context represents an interconnected network of all different types of relationships between individual student and his/her peers, teachers, other school professionals, and classroom environment, including how learning practice is constructed. Research has suggested that students who reject school values or an academic identity imposed by school system generally are perceived as disengaged students (Schlechty, 2002; Zyngier, 2007; Smyth, 2006). Educational anthropologists like Ogbu (1982) and Levinson (1992) indicate that students who are not learning clearly practice a form of political resistance (Erickson, 1987). However, such political resistance may be an indication that the school practice we provide for students fails to consider their experiences and provide a connection between learning and their daily lives. Freire (1998) has indicated that a true learning context manages an environment, allowing students to engage in a continuous transformation process where they can reconstruct what is taught with their concrete knowledge. In other words, students who are subject to political resistance have given up building a close and positive relationship with others in the school community, including the given school environment.

As learning and engaging with school are about various types of relationships, Freire (1998) proposes a core concept within the school practice: *No teaching is without learning*. Instead of transferring knowledge, Freire (1998) suggests that the role of teacher is to be an agent in the production of knowledge, to create various possibilities for students to reconstruct and reproduce learned knowledge. Indian teachers in the segregated Indian school perceived their role not only as educators who delivered the

knowledge, but they also helped students to connect with the outer world as a whole person (Dial, 2006). In Freire's sentences, Indian teachers played a role as knowledge agents. A major difference between Indian teachers and teachers in the integrated school concerns whether they are engaging with the learning process of students. Freire (1998) has pointed out that simply teaching is not possible to occur in the cognitive process. That is, teaching without learning students' different backgrounds, learning preferences, and diverse needs is not true teaching. Such type of teaching can only be called "*Transferring Knowledge*", instead of "*Teaching*."

In current teacher preparation programs, the ability to meet the diverse needs of students with disabilities has become a priority area. Years of teacher preparation research also supports the argument proposed by Freier (1998) that, "*The process of learning made teaching possible*." Therefore, what Freier (1998) suggests in teaching and learning practice demonstrates the importance of taking a student perspective to explore what is missing at school for Lumbee Indian students with disabilities.

Due to the fact that an assimilation approach was adopted in Indian Education, the literature has suggested that school practice after desegregation tended to not take Lumbee Indian culture into account, including ways of teaching and perceived teacher responsibilities as well as designed curriculum (Pember, 2008; Chavis, 1986). As the purpose of education was to assimilate Indian students into Anglo-American culture, school practice was dehumanized to accommodate this purpose. As social constructivism theorists suggest, learning is an active, contextualized, and continual transformative process within which knowledge is not simply acquired, but constructed (Dewey, 1938;



Vygotsky, 1986; Freier, 1998). The school practice designed for integrated Indian education suppressed creativity and possibilities in the learning process, especially for the purpose of assimilation. As a result, the learning process had to be dehumanized, as the knowledge and experience of Indian students were judged not important.

Clearly, an oppressive pedagogy was practiced in Indian Education, including Lumbee Indian education after desegregation. That is, the curiosity of knowing Indian culture and understanding Indian identity was suppressed. Freire (1998) believed that all individuals are curious innately. In his perspective, learners' needs should be taken into account in the teaching practice, and learners also must immerse themselves fully in the learning process. The great motivator to facilitate a good teaching and learning practice is curiosity. He further indicated that learning is a constructive process where learners should be responsible for their own adventure in learning (Freire, 1998). In the story of Lumbee Indian students, their learning curiosity in knowing their culture and identity were systematically suppressed. When they struggled with the cultural difference between their own culture and the Caucasian culture featured at school, they learned that their own culture and identity were not recognized at school at all. Additionally, in order to be successful, they need to learn to know *the* Caucasian culture and master *the* value system. Because the goal of Indian education was to have every Indian student conform to a set of pre-determined regulations and accept values inherited from Caucasian culture.

Such phenomenon is consistent to what Freier (1998) identified as oppression, which concerns the suppressed learning curiosity and consciousness. That means

learners lost freedom and authority in learning, and may not be able to recognize the meaning of learning as well as being human. Freire (1998) stated that,

I like being human, being a person, precisely because it is not already given as certain, unequivocal, or irrevocable that I am or will be “correct”...I like to be human because in my unfinishedness I know that I am conditioned. Yet conscious of such conditioning, I know I can go beyond it. (p.54).

People who lost the authority and curiosity to make adventure in their learning is very likely to believe that they should conform a pre-determined set of values and rules and master them without asking. In Freire’s perspective, this is oppression. In the history of Indian education, this is how federal government adopted such oppressive pedagogy in Indian education to achieve the goal of assimilation.

Freier (1998) further clarifies that a radical difference in education as a humanistic or dehumanizing endeavor is whether or not education is perceived simply as an act of knowledge transmission. As reflected in both Lumbee Indian and American Indian education history, white teachers tend to identify their role as an expert who transfers a set of professional knowledge to students, not one who incorporates individual needs and interests into teaching (Dial, 2006). The universal needs suggested by intrinsic motivation theory may be suppressed under this pedagogy framework. As a result, Indian students’ diverse needs may not be fulfilled in the learning process, given the context, and they may gradually show a disengaging process reflected in low graduation as well as high dropout rates as well as school withdrawal behaviors. Indian students

with disabilities tend to have a greater need in the learning process and classroom environment, so the impact of unmet needs may be even greater.

Universal psychological needs suggested by self-determination theory including competence, autonomy, and relatedness are all reflected by the identity of every individual student. That is, “*to assume*”, in Freier’s term (Freier, 1998). Freier (1998) also suggests that one critical task of educational practice is to have learners, when they interact with teachers, peers, and the school environment, engage in a transforming process of viewing themselves as creative persons who possess learning curiosity and consciousness of the person in all aspects, including social, historical, thinking, communicative, and transformative. In Lumbee Indian education history, the school was a center for Lumbee Indians to construct their identity, values, culture, and history together (Dial, 2006). Although Lumbee Indians did not suffer from racial discrimination much in Robeson County, they have also developed an awareness of unequal treatment by ethnicity and inequality of the society (Dial, 2006). Lumbee Indians, who are being oppressed, have learned to internalize their struggle and try to dehumanize themselves by accepting certain ways of thinking, behaving, speaking, and acting.

In Robeson County, Indian teachers are the second majority of the teaching force (NCDPI, 2010). An awareness of Indian culture may not be a critical issue among teachers in Robeson County Schools. However, the question may be whether teachers in Robeson County now subscribe to mainstream pedagogy after years of education, particularly because of the assimilation pedagogy taken by Federal government in the

past. Thus, many may not recognized the importance of maintaining a humanized learning process for Indian students that meets their psychological needs.

Therefore, by using a critical pedagogy lens to look at student experiences in the given school context, we can advance our understanding on whether current education practice has been able to provide an autonomy-supported environment allowing students to foster their learning curiosity and consciousness within the learning process. With this information, we can develop a deeper understanding concerning relationships among learning environments, interpersonal relationships, unmet psychological needs, and the engagement level.

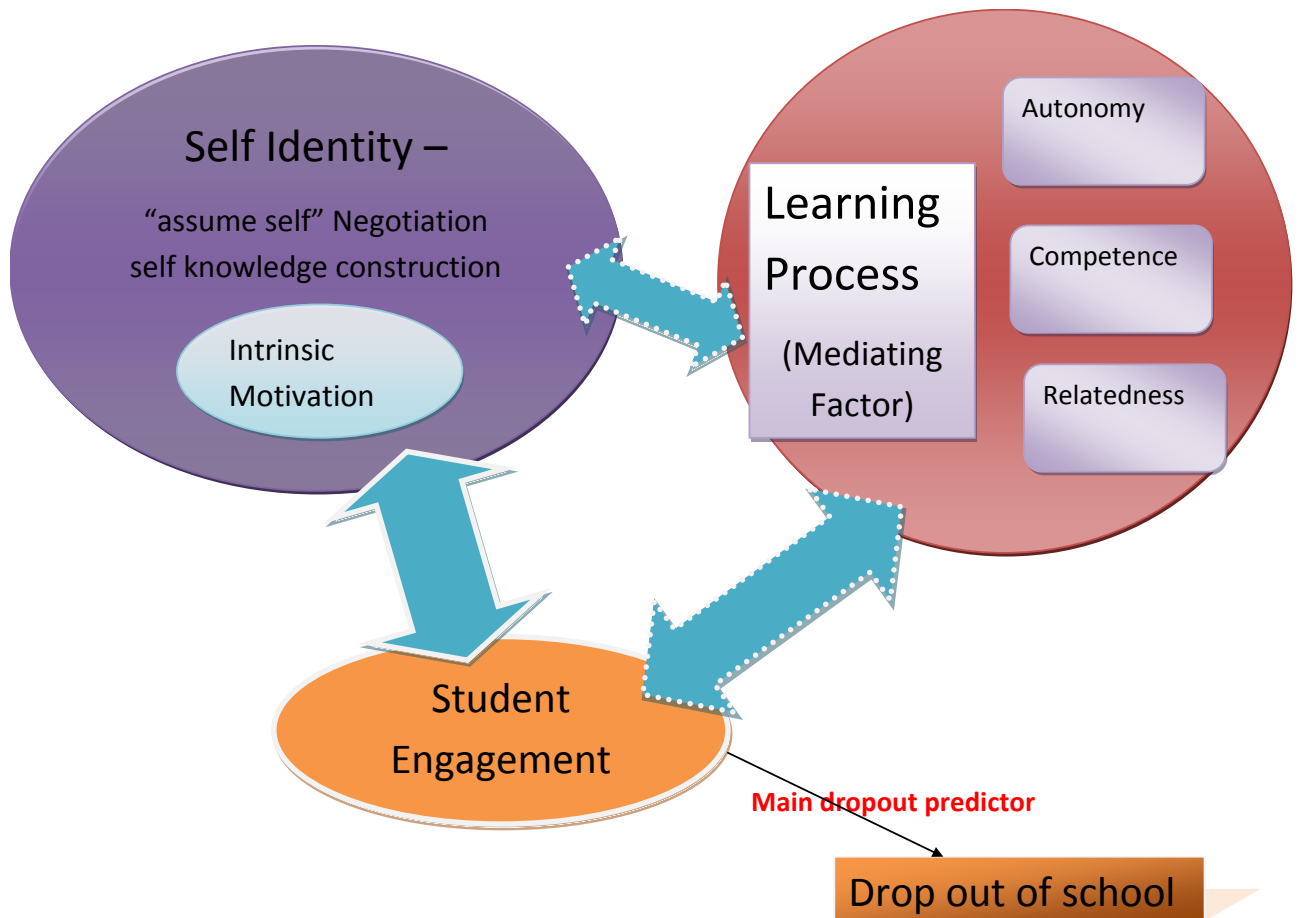
The research questions for this study are listed below and a concept map guiding research questions are presented at Figure 1.

### **Research Questions**

1. How does a perception of psychological need satisfaction influence the school engagement experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?
  - a. How do students' learning experiences reflect autonomy, competence, and a relatedness-supported environment?
  - b. What kinds of learning experiences sustain students' learning motivation?
  - c. How do different types of learning experiences influence student engagement?
2. What is the constructed meaning of schooling as reported by Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?
  - a. What is the constructed meaning of learning and engagement?
  - b. What is the constructed meaning of completing high school?

c. What are students' aspirations upon completing high school?

**Figure 1. Concept Map**



## **CHAPTER III**

### **METHODS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to understand the dropout phenomenon among American Indian students with disabilities by exploring school engaging experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities. Because phenomenological research begins in lived experiences, the aim of which is to transform *the* life experience of the participant into meaning making expressions to advance our understanding regarding *the* phenomenon (Dilthey, 1985; Moustakas, 1994), its essence is consistent with what this study hoped to investigate, that is, exploring students' engaging experiences. Therefore, phenomenological research was selected as the main research methodology in this project.

Further, a hermeneutical approach in phenomenological research methodology is designed to investigate participant experiences in a broad way rather than from the researcher's perspective (Eckartsberg, 1998). Considering the different cultural and linguistic background between the researcher and research participants, this approach was thus selected to limit the influence of the researcher's experiences on participants.

Thus, this dissertation research used hermeneutical phenomenological research as the primary methodology, and individual participant experiences are the focus of this study.

## **Research Paradigm**

Both qualitative and quantitative research should begin with a careful selection of a research paradigm. Lincoln and Guba (2005) defined a paradigm as a worldview or a belief system which can guide the investigator's research direction, including the selection of methods as well as epistemological and ontological assumption differences. The paradigm I selected for this study is critical constructivism, which consists of elements from both critical theory and constructivism.

This inquiry paradigm can be discussed from three major questions: ontological, epistemological, and methodological (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). The ontological question concerns the nature of the reality. Critical theory researchers believe that historical reality exists and continues to be shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender factors (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). Therefore, the formed structure influencing individuals' everyday life experiences includes historical reality. However, constructivism researchers hold a different position in terms of the nature of reality. They perceive reality as a socially and experientially based mental construction of every individual, and so multiple realities exist in the world (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). More importantly, reality is constructed by individual experiences, local and specific in nature. Although I am taking a constructivism position in this research and believe that reality is constructed based on students' individual experiences, I also considered the influence of the overall national climate of Indian education from an historical perspective. Because oppression has been experienced by all American Indian students and students with

disabilities, the individual mental construction of daily experiences is influenced by the historical climate of Indian education in the United States.

The epistemological question is concerned with the nature of the relationship between the investigator and research participants. Guba and Lincoln (2005) emphasize that the values of the investigator are linked with participants in critical theory paradigm. Therefore, knowledge is perceived as a value mediated during the inquiry process, which is the finding obtained from the investigation directly linked to values of the investigator. However, constructivism researchers refer to knowledge as a product produced through the inquiry process (Polkinghorne, 1989). This study is designed to obtain information from participants' perceived reality based on their individual experiences. Therefore, my epistemological position is to view knowledge as a constructed product through the investigation process. Although the interpretative nature of using a constructivism paradigm means it is not possible to avoid the influence of the investigator's values, the investigator should be a facilitator to elicit the perspective of participants based on their individual experiences.

The methodological question concerns the most suitable way to get responses from the participants. Consistent with the ontological and epistemological positions for this study, a dialectical and hermeneutical approach appeared to be the most viable way to understand the individualized experiences of the participants. More importantly, constructivism researchers put great emphasis on the knowledge construction of both participants and the investigator (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). As a result, findings were



discussed continually between the participant and the investigator until a consensus was reached.

Therefore, the paradigm I selected for this study is rooted in constructivism, especially in ways of knowledge construction and the process of interpretation and interaction. In addition, this paradigm also addresses the socio-cultural context of knowledge construction which has been formed as historical reality. Therefore, the suitable paradigm for this study is critical constructivism.

### **Description of Research Methodology**

Phenomenology can be viewed as emerging from Edmund Husserl (1859-1938). Groenewald (2004) indicates that Husserl believed that all objects exist in the world in a dependent manner, not independently. This view is consistent to what Friere (2009) proposes, that a phenomenon is interpreted by human experiences involving personal knowledge and feelings. Thus, knowledge is constructed based on personal experiences. Groenewald (2004) also clarifies this phenomenon further by explaining that reality, which is treated as a 'phenomenon', is constructed based on every individual's experiences and perceptions. The purpose of phenomenology is to capture the essence of human constructed reality based on the information they provide.

Because this study was designed to investigate how and what students have experienced during their schooling and what factors had a multidirectional influence on their self-perceived identity as well as their school engagement level, how participants interpret their life experiences was the key to this study. Although Husserl and Dilthey were the first to introduce *hermeneutic phenomenology*, they were more interested in

understanding the structure of individuals' lived experiences than the meaning making process of every individual (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000).

The meaning of *hermeneutics* was significantly expanded by Martin Heidegger (1889-1976) to include three important ideas: (a) the attempt to understand the basic structure of the phenomenon; (b) the attempt to understand how an individual interprets the phenomenon; and (c) the attempt to understand why a certain phenomenon exists in the world (Cohen, Kahn, & Steeves, 2000). Based on his analysis on Heidegger's work, Gadamer (1989) explained *hermeneutic phenomenology* as an approach which intends to study how people make interpretations of their life experiences.

Laverty (2003) compares and contrasts differences between Husserl and Heidegger's phenomenology and further suggests that they propose different means to explore the lived experiences of every individual. Instead of understanding the phenomenon itself, Heidegger intends to understand the situated meaning of an individual based on his or her historical cumulative life experiences. Additionally, Laverty (2003) also suggests that Heidegger tends to view humans as ones who are concerned about what may happen to them in a world they do not have power to control. Knowing the education history of American Indians, including Lumbee Indians and students with disabilities, their stories are all about how they can resist and survive in the face of the powerful influences from mainstream culture-based school institutions. The schooling experiences of students with both Lumbee Indian background and disability status can be imagined as an exploratory journey in a world unfamiliar to them. As a result, an everyday task for them may become a meaning making process which can lead them to

find an appropriate position in this unfamiliar world. At the same time, they also may experience difficulties in finding their own position within this world. This study was designed to document various types of schooling experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities in order to understand the relationship among their learning experiences, school engagement levels, and eventual dropout. Therefore, hermeneutic phenomenology, which aims to emphasize the meaning making process of every individual, is a methodology well-suited for this study.

### **Procedures**

The design of this hermeneutic phenomenology study is guided by its purpose, which is to elicit the authentic perspectives of the schooling experiences from Lumbee Indian students with disabilities and case managers who have been working with them. The main aim is to understand and reconstruct the experience and knowledge with research participants together. Therefore, in-depth interviews with student participants and case managers and everyday written work related to learning experiences are the best method to understand participants' schooling experiences. This section will discuss participant selection, data collection procedures, and data analysis.

### **Participant Selection and Recruitment**

Maxwell (2005) suggests that participants in a phenomenological study should be determined by purposive sampling. This sampling strategy was adopted for this research. According to U.S. census Bureau (2010), approximately 37.2% of the Robeson County population claim themselves as American Indians, and the majority of those are Lumbee Indians. Further, North Carolina data indicate that Lumbee Indian students have a higher

probability than other North Carolina students to be identified with an emotional disability (ED), learning disability (LD), or mild intellectual disability (NCDPI, 2007). Because Lumbee Indians are considered as one of the major ethnic groups in southeastern NC, their disproportionate representation in special education and their higher representation among high school dropouts have presented a confused picture concerning their educational experiences. For the purpose of increasing understanding in terms of school experiences of Lumbee high school students with disabilities, student participants and professionals who work with them closely are both valuable data sources. As a result, research participants were recruited by group. Every group of research participants consisted of one student identified with a disability and as a Lumbee, and his or her case manager. The student participants recruited for this study met three criteria: a) is a Lumbee; b) has attended to high school for at least one year; and c) is identified with either a learning disability (LD), emotional disability (ED), or mild intellectual disability (MID).

Getting access to the identified student population was extremely difficult, especially through local school districts. A total of five school districts and several local agencies working with people with disabilities were contacted. After four and half months, one local agency finally agreed to participate in this project. Through the assistance of that agency, five participants were initially identified as potential candidates. One participant did not meet participant criteria, and one participant did not respond to the recruitment request. As a result, three student participants and three case managers were successfully recruited for this research. Although the parents/guardians were

contacted to see if they would be willing to participate in this project, only one parent agreed. Therefore, there is a total of seven participants, including three student participants, three case managers, and one parent.

The recruitment process can be divided into three stages: a) getting permission from the agency, b) selecting potential candidates, and c) getting consent from each research participant.

### **Getting Permission**

Several steps were taken to get permission from the participating agency. First, I sent a cover letter stating my specific request for research collaboration. Phone calls also were used to follow up with the agency. Then, the local agency director forwarded my request to the research reviewing committee within the agency. Third, I contacted the person in charge of giving research permission to inquire about their requirements related to permission documentation. I sent to the contacted person a summary of the proposal, a research description, a graph outlining the research procedure, and consent forms for research participants. After the committee held a research review meeting, the agency agreed to give permission for this study, granting the permission through email.

### **Selecting Candidates**

The participating agency works only with all individuals with disabilities, especially those who exhibit moderate or severe needs in daily life. Consequently, potential research participants identified for this project tended to be those who already had been struggling with their school or family life. Therefore, their voice represents a population whose needs are often underserved or neglected. Although a purposive

sampling strategy was used to select potential candidates, student participants who were recruited for this project may generally come from an isolated population. As very limited research has been conducted on this population, their voice can help researchers, educators, and the general public be more aware of their struggles in their everyday lives. The process of selecting potential candidates comprised four steps:

1. A meeting was called to identify a list of potential candidates. The agency director, case managers, secretary, and counselors employed by the agency all were invited to a lunch meeting to help identify potential candidates for this project.
2. A contact person was assigned to organize the recruitment process. Each case manager contacted his/her clients to see if they would be willing to participate in this research project and to give them a recruitment package. Every recruitment package included a letter to the parent and a letter to the student participant, a figure outlining the research procedure, and two copies of a consent form, one for the parent and one for the student participant.
3. The case manager reported back to the contact person to schedule the first meeting. The meeting took place in the conference room at the agency.
4. Because case managers recruited for this study were those working with student participants, case manager participants were recruited after the first meeting with student participants took place. When the case manager gave me his/her oral consent, I scheduled a one-hour meeting with that individual. This meeting took place after three meetings with the student participant.

## **Getting Consent**

Consent was obtained at the beginning of the first scheduled meeting. Parents or legal guardians were present with the student participants for first 10-15 minutes, during which time I explained the research procedures, consent form, and the rights of participants. They had 5-10 minutes to consider whether they were willing to participate in the project. Once they decided, they signed the consent form or notified me that they would not participate in this project. Before the first meeting, their opinions about participating in this project had been queried. Therefore, all participants who came to the first meeting agreed to participate.

In terms of getting consent from case manager participants, I first obtained their oral consent after successfully recruiting student and parent participants. Due to the fact that case managers also played a role in assisting me to recruit student participants, they were aware of the research process. Therefore, I first invited them to participate in this study orally and then scheduled a meeting with them. During the first meeting, I explained all the procedures and the rights of participants before starting the interview. Written consent was obtained at the beginning of the interview with case manager participants.

## **Data Collection**

Data collection methods employed in this dissertation research consisted of in-depth individual interviews with student participants and case managers, field notes of the researcher, and writing or drawing journals of the student participants. All the

collected data including consent forms from participants, journals, and transcripts of taped interviews were stored in a file cabinet or researcher's home computer.

### **In-depth interviews.**

Hermeneutic phenomenology puts great emphasis on the knowledge co-construction process, which features a reflexive and joint authored approach (Gordon, 1998). Therefore, the individual interview is considered a major data collection method. This methodology builds an environment allowing participants to reconstruct their knowledge based on their experiences and enabling the researcher to understand and explore participants' descriptions to get an authentic perspective (Wimpenny & Gass, 2000; Kvale, 1996).

The interview format selected for this study was an unstructured interview. Due to the fact that this research intended to explore the phenomenon through all participants' experiences in a relational context, a life story interview method was suitable. Atkinson (1997) suggests that one of the major characteristics of a life story method is its capability to access the psychological part of the self, which refers to how a person can unfold his or her experiences and understand how such a sense of self may guide a life story step by step. He further suggests that a life story interview is used differently with every research participant; however, it should consist of at least two to three interviews so that the story of the participant can be understood at a deeper level (Atkinson, 1997). Therefore, this project was designed to interview every student participant three times. Because an unstructured interview format encourages participants to share their life



stories, the researcher served as a facilitator so participants could share their experiences in every interview.

Due to the fact that the case managers work with the participants and their families closely, interviewing case managers was a very valuable data source contributing to the story of each of their clients. The purpose of this interview was to get case manager's perspectives on the struggles and challenges experienced by the student participant and the family and to understand his/her experiences in working with the student and the family. Further, the interview was designed to supplement the knowledge obtained from interviewing student participants and parents about what had happened during their school life and to allow case managers to contribute to the knowledge co-construction process so as to explain the observed phenomenon. To explore the experience and perception of case managers at a deeper level, an unstructured interview was also an appropriate format, because it allowed participants to share anything related to what happened during their collaboration with the student/family/school and about student's schooling experiences.

#### **Interview procedure.**

There were two types of individual interviews: one is for student participants and included three interviews. The other one was for case manager participants and included one interview.

Initially, every student interview was planned to be scheduled every two weeks. Because of scheduling difficulties, not all participants' interviews followed the same two-week interval. For one participant, time from the second meeting to the third meeting

was almost a month. Case manager interviews were scheduled after the associated client had completed all three interviews.

The first interview for student participants had two major phases. The first phase took approximately 5-10 minutes to complete. The purpose of this phase was to build a relationship with the research participant, explain the purpose of the study, and get consent from participants. For the second part of the interview, participants were encouraged to talk about general feelings and perception related to school life. I served as a facilitator in the process, so the participant was able to organize their own responses as they wished. This part of the interview took approximately 30 to 40 minutes. The total time for the first interview was approximately 40 to 50 minutes, although it varied by participant.

The purpose of the second interview was to explore participants' schooling experience at a deeper level. Topics discussed in this interview were embedded within their experience sharing and included good and bad learning experiences, positive and negative emotional connection with peers and teachers, perceptions of his or her own capabilities, interpersonal relationships, perceived position within the school community, and perception of his or her cultural background and disability status. This interview took approximately 70 to 90 minutes and varied by participant. Participant feedback on information obtained from the previous interviews was obtained at the third interview. This took approximately 30-40 minutes. The participants also shared their feelings participating in this project.

Regarding the case manager interviews, the consent process took 5-10 minutes to complete and it was similar to the student process. The interview took approximately 50-60 minutes and varied by participants.

### **Field Notes.**

Field notes in this study can be divided into parts. The first part consisted of the descriptive notes, used to record the line of questioning each participant was more willing to respond to and emotional reactions of participants during the interview process. The second part comprised reflection notes. During the data collection process, culture differences concerning socio-economic status and ethnic cultural and linguistic background played a significant role influencing the interaction between the researcher as story listener and all participants. Therefore, reflections on social interactions and the relationship also were recorded in the field notes.

### **Journal and Discussion Notes.**

Writing and drawing journals were given to the student participants at the first meeting. It was proposed that these be collected at the end of the interview process and discussed at the second and third meeting. However, only one participant completed the journal and turned it in at the end of the third meeting. However, the participant was not willing to discuss the journal during the session. When I inquired further, he responded that he was afraid that the journal would be difficult to read because of his writing. Although the other two participants did not complete the journal, they responded in a similar manner when I first gave them the journal.

Considering the past schooling experiences of participants recruited for this project, the journal may not have been an appropriate data collection method. For example, two student participants experienced a numerous of suspensions and having problems completing academic work were referred to by them as a major conflict between themselves and the teacher. Completing journals were likely to be perceived as another academic task. As a result, refusing to complete a writing or drawing journal was not a surprising act. Eventually, the journal return rate was only one out of three. One case manager acted as a facilitator, assisting his client to complete the journal and turned it in at the final meeting.

### **Data Analysis**

Because hermeneutic phenomenology is a “research methodology aimed at producing rich textual descriptions of the experiencing of selected phenomena in the lifeworld of individuals that are able to connect with the experience of all of us collectively” (Smith, 1997), data analysis was an ongoing interpreting process based on collected data on the schooling experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities. The purpose of using this research methodology was to construct a comprehensive set of participant descriptions which could portray a phenomenon and explained its relationship with individuals in that particular context (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). Therefore, a co-construction process and interpretation were two major components of the overall data analysis process. In order to accomplish this, the iterative member checking strategy suggested by Lincoln and Guba (2000) was in continual use throughout data analysis. The audiotaped files of the 12 individual interviews were transcribed and entered into a

Word document. Transcripts were reviewed for accuracy twice by simultaneously reading all the transcripts while listening to the audio files. Then, a five-stage analysis procedure developed from the phenomenology research literature was used for analyzing the data.

#### 1. Stage One: Data Immersion and Organization

The goal at the initial stage was to get a sense of the data and conduct a preliminary interpretation of the texts. Emerging thoughts in this preliminary analysis were documented in memos. Based on the interview transcriptions and field notes, a memo describing the schooling experiences of the three student participants based on students' perspective was generated. This stage was repeated three times until the case manager interviews were completed.

#### 2. Stage Two: Understanding – Identify topics and associated data texts

All emerged thoughts from Stage One were identified as a list of topics. After reading through data texts, each topic with associated participant descriptions was identified. Following Stage One analysis, the data entered stage two for further analysis. This step was done repeatedly until the analysis of the case manager interviews from stage one entered this stage and no new topics emerged during the process.

After all data at Stage One entered this stage, every topic was assigned to a category: major topics, unique topics, or leftover topics. Major topics were the ones mentioned by two or more participants, either students or case managers, more than three times. Unique topics were the ones mentioned by one participant, either a student or case

manager, more than three times. Leftover topics were the ones briefly discussed by any participants once or when asked by the researcher.

During the interview and data collection process, the strategies of clarifying and requesting of examples to understand the meaning of participant descriptions were constantly used. Ajjawi and Higgs (2007) suggest that iterative member checking by referring to participant feedback and probing questions increased researchers' understanding of what participants meant at a deeper level. Therefore, I also used this strategy to enrich my understanding of the phenomenon.

### 3. Stage Three: Abstraction – Identify codes and themes

In this stage, codes were developed, and important themes based on the overall data set and individual participant were identified. Interpretations of every interview, journal, and field notes were used to form a picture for every participant. This stage was implemented repeatedly until the final version of codes and themes was developed.

### 4. Stage Four: Synthesis

After the final version of codes and themes was developed, the analysis entered Stage Four. In this stage, themes and subthemes developed from Stage Three were further elaborated. The synthesizing process followed the basic form of the hermeneutic circle, analysis moving from parts to the whole (Bontekoe, 1996). Lavery (2003) indicates that hermeneutic phenomenology took an interpretative approach to concentrate on exploring the historical meaning of every individual's experiences and their impact on the personal within a particular context. Dilthey (1990) suggests that the principal of obtaining a comprehensive understanding of individual experiences is to engage in an

ongoing reciprocal process of identifying a relationship between segments of participant descriptions and an overall picture of phenomenon the participants tried to convey. The illustration generalized from the comprehensive understanding of collected data serves as foundation of hermeneutic circle. Schleiermacher (1990) elaborated that the hermeneutic circle of understanding proceeds through a network of interrelationships of the whole. That meant the data as a whole gave meaning to individual parts which were participant descriptions, and all the parts formed together and gave the meaning to the whole as well (Geanellos, 1998).

At this stage, I applied the principal of hermeneutic circle to synthesize emerged themes and continued to reflect on whether the identified themes digressed from the authentic perspective of participants by using an iterative member checking strategy and triangulating data collected from interviews, field notes, and journal discussions.

#### 5. Stage Five: Illustration

At this stage, I used the analysis results from Stage One to Four to form the phenomenon described by every participant and prepare a personal account story illustrated by participant perspectives. Major themes, subthemes, a relationship map among themes, and associated data texts were all used as the foundation to reconstruct participant experiences.

The five-step data analysis procedure was used repeatedly until all interview transcripts were added into text data. Once all the data were transcribed and analyzed, a detailed analysis of the schooling experiences of participants was conducted. Data related to life experiences usually concerned how participants made sense and interpreted their

experiences, social interactions, and surrounding environment. For the purpose of capturing the most relevant life experiences, Porter (1994) recommends that researchers use the strategy of describing, comparing, and distinguishing to identify the authentic meaning of participants and integrate what they intend to tell related to their life experiences. Therefore, these strategies were continually used throughout the whole analysis process. For example, in order to understand the various types of frustrating experiences of student participants, I would describe the frustrating life experiences participants previously shared, then ask them to compare these experiences and give rationales of why they felt the way they did. Further, concerning similar frustrated learning experiences, I also asked participants to identify and distinguish what they liked or disliked most or compared their experiences to what they believed the learning experience was supposed to be.

### **Trustworthiness**

To evaluate the trustworthiness of the research, a discussion of validity and reliability is crucial (Seale, 1999). Morrow (2005) indicates that criteria for trustworthiness in qualitative research are determined by the selected paradigm as well as the types of investigation. Stenbacka (2001) argues that the quality of solid qualitative research is its ability to generate understanding. Therefore, the *authenticity criteria* introduced by Guba and Lincoln (1989) appear to be most relevant, because the purpose of this study was to elicit knowledge from the authentic perspectives of participants' experiences.



*Authenticity criteria* include *fairness*, *ontological authenticity*, *educative authenticity*, *catalytic authenticity*, and *tactical authenticity*. *Fairness* concerns quality of balance, which means participants' different constructions of meanings should be presented in a balanced way to avoid marginalization. Concerning this criterion, I used the strategy of describing, comparing, and distinguishing to allow participants to present what they meant more than one time and in multiple ways. With these strategies, my understanding of participants' perspectives was advanced. Because participants sometimes presented ambiguous perspectives on the same topic influenced by the relationship between the researcher and the participant, repeated use of these strategies helped the researcher to better understand the participant's perspective and to develop an ability to present participant perspectives in a balanced way.

For *ontological authenticity*, the researcher should help participants to improve, expand, and elaborate their constructions of meaning. Strategies used by the researcher such as describing, comparing, and obtaining participant feedback all had ontological authenticity characteristics. Therefore, this criterion was met in this study.

*Educative authenticity* refers to the issue participants being able to develop a deeper understanding and new way of seeing things while participating in a study. This criterion was not met successfully in this study. Although one of the purposes of this study was to assist participants to reorganize their experiences and re-conceptualize their perspectives concerning these past experiences, some participants in this study had very negative schooling experiences, and they continued to experience them while the

interviews were conducted. As a result, some participants refused to view their past experiences in a different way.

*Catalytic authenticity* addresses the issue about the extent to actions which are stimulated through the research process. Because student participants recruited for this study were identified with an emotional or behavioral disability, the researcher paid great attention to their emotional reactions to interview questions. However, interview questions concerned participants' schooling experiences. Due to the fact that they reported poor schooling experiences and teacher-student relationships at school, questions were very likely to stimulate their emotional reactions to the perceived unfair treatment. Once participants show strong emotional reactions, the researcher would stop for a short time and inquire participants' opinions about whether to proceed with the same line of questioning. Therefore, this criterion was addressed during the research process.

*Tactical authenticity* concerns about whether participants are empowered to take any kinds of actions during the research process. Participants were empowered at the first meeting when researchers introduced the research project. Throughout the research process, participants were reminded that the purpose of the project was to understand their stories to explore why some students would eventually drop out of the school. Therefore, this criterion was successfully met during the research process.

To achieve authenticity criteria, several general strategies were used to ensure the quality of the research. The first strategy was dependability, which concerned whether the research, including the researcher, data collection, and analysis strategies were conducted

in a consistent way over time (Gasson, 2004). I followed a systematic procedure to recruit participants, explain research procedures, schedule meetings, collect interview data, and complete field notes after each interview. However, interviews were not scheduled in same interval, thus limiting consistency potentially in collecting data.

Morrow (2005) suggests that the process of generating findings should be repeatable and explicit. Therefore, I repeated the first three stages in the five-step procedure after every interview transcript was added into the existing text data. All the research activities were recorded in researcher's field notes as well.

The second strategy was triangulation, to capture and respect multiple perspectives. Denzin (1970) identified four types of triangulation: (a) data triangulation, by gathering data in different times, social occasions, or population; (b) investigator triangulation, in which more than one researcher is involved; c) theoretical triangulation, using one or more theoretical positions to interpret data; and (d) methodological triangulation, using more than one method to collect data. In this study, data triangulation and methodological triangulation were adopted to ensure reliability.

Two different groups of participants were interviewed: student participants and case manager participants. By triangulating data collected from both groups, uncertain meaning from participant descriptions could be further clarified. Concerning methodological triangulation, interviews, writing or drawing journals, and field notes of the researcher were used as data collection methods for this project. Data collected from multiple methods were triangulated to ensure that the interpretation of participant descriptions represented their authentic perspective.

The third strategy for reliability is reflexivity. Morrow (2005) suggests that interpretative/constructive and critical researchers are more likely to position the researcher as a co-constructor of meaning. As a result, the subjectivity and bias of the researcher is an integral part of collected data. Because this research took the same position in perceiving researcher as a co-constructor of meaning, reflexivity was very critical. Rennie (2004) defines reflexivity as self-consciousness in self-awareness. Monitoring subjectivity and the influence of the researcher's bias is the main purpose of this strategy. To achieve this goal, I kept a section of reflection notes within the field notes protocol. During the interviews, I wrote down some key words for my reflections and observations. After the interviews, I wrote half to one page of reflection notes to monitor how my subjectivity influenced the interview process or the interaction with the participant.

The fourth strategy for ensuring reliability in this project was participant feedback. This was used to validate whether the product of the co-construction between the researcher and the participant had yielded authentic construction of the participant's meaning. This was used throughout the data collection process. At the third interview, the participant feedback strategy was specifically used to validate whether my understanding was consistent with what participants intended to express. Some written statements would be presented to participants to allow them to reconstruct their thoughts in terms of the story they wanted to tell.

### **Ethical Considerations**

In this research, participants were constructed as co-researchers. All participants were given a consent form. The researcher provided detailed information about the research procedure and risk through the recruitment package and the explanation at the beginning of the first interview for student participants and the interview meeting with case manager participants. It was important to explain to participants that they were allowed to skip any sensitive questions or not share anything they did not feel comfortable with discussing.

My role as a researcher during the interview was to assist participants to describe their schooling experiences while participants were protected by the ethical principles described by the Belmont Report (1979). The first principle is to distinguish clearly between research and practice. No participant has undergone any therapy under any circumstances as part of this research. The second principle is to show respect to involved participants. Participants were entitled to the protection of their rights at all times. The third principle is that the researcher should be responsible for protecting the participants from harmful actions. The fourth principle is that participants are entitled to receive any information related to the study, including research findings. This was clarified for participants. Participants should be treated in a just manner, and researcher reflection leads to the conclusion.

In addition, due to the fact that I am from an ethnic minority background, I risked projecting what I felt about what participants intended to express and filtering important information from the collected data. Additionally, what participants expressed may have

been influenced by their understanding of what I wanted to know. Therefore, it was important for me to use authenticity criteria and several strategies, including triangulation, reflexivity, participant feedback, and dependability, to ensure the quality of my data collection and data analysis.

## **CHAPTER IV**

### **RESULTS**

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the schooling experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities to identify important factors contributing to their various levels of engagement. Throughout the process of data analysis, I used the basic form of the hermeneutic circle (Bontekoe, 1996) and the strategies of repeatedly describing, comparing, inferring, and distinguishing (Moustakas, 1994; Porter, 1994). This process led to the identification of 20 topics, including seven major topics, eight unique topics, and five leftover topics. Based on these topics, five themes were derived, which included three major themes, one unique theme, and one leftover theme. Stories reconstructed from both students' and case managers' experiences are presented in this chapter.

#### **Descriptions of Collected Data**

The collected data for this project included 12 interview transcripts and the researcher's field notes. All of these are attached as Appendices A through M. Descriptive information for each type of data is presented in Table 1.

**Table 1. Descriptions of Collected Data**

Participant	Type of Data /Appendix Number
Student A: Austin	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appendix 3: three student interviews (34 minutes; 97 minutes; 30 minutes)</li><li>• Appendix 4: Case manager interview (58 minutes)</li></ul>
Student B: Richie	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appendix 5: three student interviews (44 minutes; 47 minutes; 48 minutes)</li><li>• Appendix 6: Case manager interview (72 minutes)</li></ul>
Student C: Randy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Appendix 7: three student interviews (27 minutes; 76 minutes; 25 minutes)</li><li>• Appendix 8: Case manager interview (55 minutes)</li></ul>

### **Data Analysis and Interpretation**

Data collected for this study were analyzed through five-step procedure, which consisted of (a) data immersion and organization; (b) understanding - identifying topics and associated texts; (c) abstraction – identifying codes and themes; (d) synthesis; and (e) illustration. Examples of analyzed results obtained from each stage are presented respectively in this section.

#### **Stage 1 & 2: Data Immersion, Organization, and Understanding**

At this stage, a memo documenting thoughts and preliminary interpretation based on the experiences of interacting with participants and transcripts was generated. Part of the memo is presented in Table 2.



**Table 2. Stage 1 Memo of Initial Interpretation**

Transcripts (P – participant; I – Interviewer)	Initial Interpretation
<p>P: Yeah... she has suspended me for nothing, and she said to everybody that I said, "I will kill her." She is the type you must do what she told you... how would you feel? If I am a teacher and I just write a referral and put in your record to be against you. How would you feel right now? Would you be mad like me or be frustrated? I am pretty sure that she has turned me in for nothing sometimes. She told me about it... she just write me into the record so I can go home... that's what she do... I don't know what I can do about it...</p> <p>P: She said this way... if you come back.. I gonna fax the paper out to put on your record... how can she do that like she is threatening me.... when I did not do the wrong thing... she just like to punish me for nothing.., just because she feel like she wants to do it... like I got the authority to do what I want. I don't know if she got the authority to do that or not.. but to me. it's like she got no reason to do it.. you just can't do that because somebody didn't do what you say..</p> <p>P: Yeah.. no... there is no other person can get me my temper.. and other teacher just start to say what she told them.. cause I am not gonna let you consider me to do this and doing things I don't even do...</p>	<p><i>The student shows his emotion and anger while presenting his story. The student did not trust the teacher and felt frustrated by whatever the teacher said or did.</i></p> <p><i>The student sensed the power of professionals at school and tried to fight against it.</i></p> <p><i>System of making referral for behavior issue. Did any special education teacher or third party make any observation before the teacher makes the official referral for disciplinary action?</i></p> <p><i>Power struggle between student and teacher.</i></p> <p><i>The participant feels that he cannot trust anyone at school. All professionals at school are on the side of teacher. Negative teacher student relationship. The student feels no autonomy power during the learning process.</i></p>
<p>I: What do you think about going school there?</p> <p>P: I just feel it's weird.. if you go out there... and think I am gonna being good and pass... then you can pass. but.. when you go out there and get into trouble... you let them do whatever they gotta do to you, you gonna be dropout.. you ain't gonna pass. you think it's their fault.. but it's your fault....you know what I mean...you know .. at the school, some teachers are just .. they are just pain in the butt... only if you got good attitudes.. you gotta pass... that's why I am back into 9th grade.</p>	<p><i>Power struggle between teacher and student.</i></p> <p><i>Internal conflict with school rules and the way of how to behave, act, and speak.</i></p> <p><i>Issue with negative teacher student relationship.</i></p>

<p>I: So can you tell me what happen at the time... what happened?</p> <p>P: She made me look like a dummy in front of the class.. and I got mad... I fussed out at the classroom, and that was it...</p> <p>I: So.. she just said that in front of the whole class?</p> <p>P: She just made me look stupid. and I was trying to help somebody out at the same time. you know what I mean.. but.. it was mess up.. so I got mad.. I went off on her... and she just calls my parents or whoever, and I was suspended.. after that, she never talk to me anymore. when she say something.. she needs to make it sarcastic.. right?</p>	<p><i>The participant does not feel respected.</i></p> <p><i>Negative teacher student relationship.</i></p> <p><i>Suspension – how to determine disciplinary action regarding student’s behavior.</i></p> <p><i>It may not be a competent supported environment for the participant.</i></p>
<p>P2: Some teachers doesn't want to help you.. but some does...</p> <p>I: Ok...so you mean.. some teachers try to help you but some don't...</p> <p>P2: They don' care....</p> <p>I: Why you feel they don't care....</p> <p>P2: Because they don't try to help you the easy way to do it...</p> <p>I: Ok... so do you ask them to help you?</p> <p>P2: Yeah...</p> <p>I: The substitute..</p> <p>I: So when that happens, what do you do?</p> <p>I: Go to sleep...</p> <p>I: Or call mother to pick me up in an excuse</p>	<p><i>The participant feels frustrated by learning; however, teacher may not provide suitable support for him during the learning process.</i></p> <p><i>Caring environment is important for the participant.</i></p> <p><i>Teacher expectations from students – the teacher may not have high expectations...</i></p> <p><i>The participant feels frustrated easily.</i></p>

From the initial interpretations of the collected data, emerged thoughts were recorded at the end of each segment of the transcript. At Stage 2, all emerged thoughts were converted into identified topics. All topics were categorized into six major types: (a) student perceived support; (b) teacher-student relationships; (c) family/agency/school collaboration; (d) discipline; (e) value conflicts; and (f) interpersonal relationships. All identified topics and associated categories are listed below in Table 3.

**Table 3. Topics of Initial Interpretations**

<b>Types of Issues</b>	<b>Topics</b>
1. Student Perceived Support	1. Learning support 2. Expression of anger and frustration 3. Types of learning activities 4. Future plan/transition planning 5. Received programs and services 6. Home schooling
2. Teacher-student Relationship	7. Power struggle between teacher and students 8. Teacher characteristics 9. Teacher expectations
3. Family/Agency/School Collaboration	10. Family characteristics/background 11. Collaboration relationship among school teachers, parents/students, and agency/case managers 12. Family needs and support
4. Discipline	13. Appropriateness of disciplinary actions 14. Official behavior referral system 15. Teachers' tolerance level in determining whether the student needs a referral
5. Value Conflict	16. Conflict between value system of student/family and the school 17. Conflict between family beliefs and school based mainstream beliefs
6. Interpersonal relationships	18. Relationship with classmates and friends outside of the school 19. Family relationship

Based on how many times participants mentioned the same topic, every topic was classified as a major topic, unique topic, or leftover topic. Major topics are the ones mentioned by two or more participants, either students or case managers, more than three times. Unique topics are the ones mentioned by one participant, either a student or case

manager, more than three times. Leftover topics are the ones only briefly discussed by any participant once or when asked by the researcher, as classified topics are displayed in Table 4.

**Table 4. Major, Unique, and Leftover Topics**

<b>Major Topics</b>	<b>Unique Topics</b>	<b>Leftover Topics</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher-student relationship</li> <li>• Power struggles between teacher and students</li> <li>• Expressions of anger and frustration</li> <li>• Collaboration relationships among school teachers, parents/students, and agency/case managers</li> <li>• Disciplinary actions</li> <li>• Teachers' tolerance level for students' problem behaviors</li> <li>• Conflict between value system of student/family and the school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teacher characteristics</li> <li>• Family characteristics/background</li> <li>• Official behavioral referral system</li> <li>• Family needs and support</li> <li>• Self-identity</li> <li>• Interpersonal relationships with peer</li> <li>• Family relationship</li> <li>• Home schooling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Learning support</li> <li>• Types of learning activities</li> <li>• Teacher expectations</li> <li>• Future plans/transition planning</li> <li>• Received programs and services</li> </ul>

It is important to note that at this stage most participants shared their experiences relating to their relationship with teachers and their treatment at school. Only one student participant discussed learning difficulties he has experienced at school. All participants, including students and case managers, talked about challenges they had experienced when interacting with the school personnel, or the family. Much student engagement and

classroom management literature discusses how to draw students' attention in class and how to support students in learning. However, such strategies may not be effective if a caring teacher and positive teacher-student relationship are not in place. Expectations for a teacher-student relationship may vary among different ethnic groups. Yet, discussions concerning teacher-student relationship within the school in this study reflected that student participants may put greater emphasis on interpersonal relationship within the learning process.

### **Stage 3 Abstraction: Identify Codes and Themes**

Throughout the process of data analysis, there was ongoing interpretation of the collected data. Strategies for maintaining authenticity suggested by Lincoln and Guba (2000) were continually used during the whole process of data analysis. I repeatedly used reflection notes to check the closeness (or faithfulness) between my interpretations and data texts.

The purpose of using phenomenology was to construct a vivid description of human behaviors and experiences within their reality. Swanson-Kauffman and Schonwald (1988) suggest that outcomes of phenomenology research help readers who have experienced the phenomenon to analyze their own reality with identified themes. Therefore, at this stage, it was important to check derived codes and themes repeatedly with data texts to reconstruct the message participants intended to deliver. By using this cross-checking strategy, a list of codes and themes were identified, and they are presented in Table 5.

**Table 5. Derived Codes and Themes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Codes</b>
Programs and services received by students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Disciplinary related programs and services</li> <li>• Future plans/transition planning</li> <li>• Lack of extracurricular activities</li> <li>• Culturally supported programs and instructions</li> <li>• Disciplinary referral and determination process</li> <li>• Home schooling</li> </ul>
Teacher-student relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teachers' tolerance level</li> <li>• Important characteristics of a positive relationship</li> <li>• Needs for psychological satisfaction</li> <li>• Needs for expressing emotions appropriately</li> <li>• Power struggles between teachers and students</li> <li>• Student's self identity</li> </ul>
Value conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Purpose of school</li> <li>• Expectations from school</li> <li>• Definition of getting a diploma</li> <li>• Belief system in how to act, behave, speak, and dress</li> </ul>
School/Family/Agency Collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Communication difficulties</li> <li>• Trustworthy relationships</li> <li>• Role definition in a collaborative relationship</li> <li>• Family needs and support</li> </ul>
Influence of Indian heritage	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Family beliefs and value systems</li> <li>• Interpretations of self's Lumbee background</li> </ul>

#### **Stage 4: Synthesis**

At this stage, the basic form of a hermeneutic circle, which continues to move from part to the whole and the whole to the part, was used further (Bontekoe, 1996). Themes and subthemes derived from previous stages were elaborated further. The strategy of cross-checking, iterative member checking, and triangulation were used to determine whether derived themes are consistent to participants' authentic perspective.

The final version of derived themes and subthemes are organized and presented in Table 6.

**Table 6. Final Version of Derived Themes and Subthemes**

<b>Themes</b>	<b>Subthemes</b>
Programs and services received by students	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Disability services</li><li>• Disciplinary related programs and services</li><li>• Future plans/transition planning</li><li>• Home schooling</li><li>• Teacher shortage</li></ul>
Teacher-student relationships	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Power struggles between teachers and students</li><li>• Identity, including both teacher's and student's</li></ul>
Value conflicts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Belief system of how to act, behave, speak, and dress</li><li>• The conflict between family values and school values</li></ul>
School/Family/Agency collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Communication difficulties, including language</li><li>• Role identity in a collaborative trustworthy relationship</li><li>• Cultural awareness of family needs</li></ul>
Supported learning environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Respectful communication</li><li>• Competency promoted in the classroom and teacher-student relationship</li><li>• Autonomy in academic-related activities</li></ul>

Five major themes and 14 subthemes were developed at this stage. Five major themes include (a) programs and services received by students; (b) teacher-student relationships; (c) value conflicts; (d) school/family/agency collaboration; and (e) supported learning environment.

#### **Stage 5: Illustration - Results**

Because all student participants in this study appeared to have a poor relationship with teachers and all of them encountered an issue of whether the school had



implemented Individualized Education Programs (IEPs) accordingly, obtaining IEP documents from the school seemed to be a sensitive act from my perspective. Therefore, IEP documents were not collected to avoid causing potential conflict between the teacher and the student participant. As most parents shared their child's IEP with case managers at the agency, information pertaining student participants' IEPs and disability categories were gathered from students' and case managers' descriptions.

**Austin's story.**

*Programs and services received by students.*

Austin, who was determined to have an Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD), was a 9<sup>th</sup> grade student and was identified with behavioral disability at school. He is supposed to be in 10<sup>th</sup> grade, but he repeated 9<sup>th</sup> grade because he received an in-school suspension for two and half months last year. He has received mental health and case management services from the agency for more than two years. Due to the fact that he was suspended before withdrawing from the school last year, his Individualized Education Program (IEP) is no longer in place and needs to be redeveloped to accommodate his current status. All programs and services should be determined at an IEP meeting. However, the IEP meeting has not been held yet. Based on information from Austin's case manager, Rudy, the only thing he has received at school for now are special accommodations for his emotional and behavioral needs. The quote from his case manager reflects the challenging situation Austin is experiencing at school, which may be an influential factor affecting his school performance.

They withdraw from the school, so the status becomes therapy only.....I have not heard anything about an IEP meeting this year yet... but they do provide special accommodation for him.. they provide a special place for him to go, when he needs to calm down. ~Rudy.

I have not heard anything about the IEP meeting yet. ~Austin

Another emerged issue is whether the school system has provided appropriate instruction and services for Austin. Since the school system is obligated to provide an appropriate education for students with disabilities, an IEP meeting is supposed to be scheduled to determine a new set of programs and services. However, it appears that the school Austin is going to holds a passive attitude toward scheduling Austin's IEP. Rudy offered the following comments to me when I asked about his experiences in following up concerning students' IEP:

They are trying to help. But the problem is, you should pressure them to do the IEP. They don't do it. I have a client making a referral back in April or March. The school said it is too close to the end of the year. So it is delayed until this year. It was still two months till the end of year. I think they don't seem like it. But I think they should have done it then. ~Rudy

The delay potentially has affected Austin's schooling performance greatly. During the discussion about the IEP meeting, Rudy raised the topic that Austin was failing all his classes at midterm. It is reasonable to assume that a lack of quality special education services may contribute to his poor school performance. Further, the school's apparently passive attitude regarding rewriting Austin's IEP also plays a significant role resulting in his school failure.

Due to the fact that Austin has a history of suspension, his experiences of attending disciplinary related programs also have influenced his perception of learning experiences significantly. Last semester, Austin was placed in an alternative program. He described the program as in-school prison. He described his perception of the purpose of the program in the following quote:

The purpose of that program is to make me stay out of trouble, make me sad. It works too. I don't want to go back in there, cause..if you go into a fight or something, they put you in for the whole semester, and it ain't fun. ~Austin

In that program, all lessons are conducted via computers. Therefore, students do not have teachers in the classroom. In Austin's words, they only have a coach to keep them inside the room. He believed that the program was designed to scare students to prevent them from misbehaving again. Regarding instructions provided in the program, Austin does not perceive it is learning. From his perspective, he did not have any classes within alternative program and did not learn or do anything. He described a day in the program this way:

You stay there all day, you look at the wall.. you go out to eat.. you come back to class...that's it. You sit until the bell ring. We do not have a teacher there, only a coach. He is there to make sure we are in there and the order is kept. They give you work at computer. I suppose they think you learn that way, but I ain't do anything, because it's computer. ~Austin

From Austin's perspective, being placed in an alternative program is totally unacceptable. It only teaches him that he should follow school rules and school-based values to avoid being placed in this program. From his perspective, being a high school

dropout is very possible if you are placed in an alternative program. He stated that, “Some people would be dropouts, because they would not come to school”.

Alternative programs in North Carolina are designed to provide services for students at risk of truancy, academic failure, behavior problems, or dropping out of the school, and they are supposed to better meet the special needs of certain students (Bonneau & Owen, 2010). Therefore, education services should be appropriately provided for students who are placed in an alternative program, particularly when students are not considered suspended while attending an alternative program within the school (Bonneau & Owen, 2010). Yet, from Austin’s description, services provided by the alternative program are not only not meeting his special needs, but also not providing education services, even a qualified teacher. Given the fact that the school is responsible for providing students with disabilities education services, Austin’s education rights appear to have been violated in this situation.

Other than Austin’s experiences in the alternative program, it is important to discuss how disciplinary decisions were made in Austin’s case. Given all Austin’s past suspension experiences, he reported that disciplinary measures determined by the school system usually do not involve him or other students in decision-making process. His mother would be informed to pick him up at school after the disciplinary action was taken. He described the procedure in the following quote:

They call you in there and say, blah..blah..blah.., you are being suspended. When you come back to school, we put you in alternatives, ok, then. That easy! ~ Austin

However, for students with disabilities, IDEA mandates that within 10 days, if any decision is made to change the placement of the child with a disability because of a violation of school rules, the IEP team must meet to discuss whether the student's behavior has a direct relationship to the student's disability or to the school's failure to implement student's IEP. In certain cases, the school is allowed to remove a student to an alternative educational setting for up to 45 consecutive school days. However, on the 11<sup>th</sup> day of exclusion, the district is responsible for providing services for the student. Given the disciplinary situation described by Austin, no services were being offered, and he was placed in the alternative program for more than two months, way more than 45 days. Further, parents appeared not involved with the disciplinary discussion. This is also a serious violation of Austin's right to received education as well. Additionally, the fact that he does not have an IEP is also one more serious violation of Austin's rights.

Clearly, all these descriptions of Austin's school experiences indicate that he may not have received appropriate education services at school and that violations of his education rights may have occurred.

When asked about how he feels about the school, Austin offers following comments:

I think the school is a weird place... if you go out there, think I gonna being good and pass.. then you can pass. But , when you go out there and get into trouble, you let them do whatever they gotta do to you, you gonna be dropout, because they don't want you in there. ~ Austin

From students' perception, school authority figures, such as teachers, hold power determining whether he can learn at school or not. He further described the challenge of staying at school and passing all the classes in the following quote:

I would stay in school.. you know what I mean... it's just like.. since they put me in this class called alternative.. and you just stay there all day... you look at the wall... well. you go out to eat.. you come back to the class... that's it... you sit until the bell ring,, then you go home... they even wouldn't let me out for PE..... I say.. forget it.. mama.. she starts homeschooling me, I was like... I don't want to do this... I want to go back to regular school... cause... I don't know... I like the school... but it's just.. like I say... you gotta had the attitude... you cannot just knock out...they gonna kick you out... then.. you gonna fail... (yeah).... you gonna fail.... ~ Austin

Based on these descriptions, Austin clearly does not trust his teachers and school administrators. In his mind, he was labeled as a student with problem behaviors and he was not welcomed at school. Such perspective implied that a negative relationship between teachers and Austin has existed for a long time and that these interacting experiences deeply affect his perspective of schooling.

*Teacher-student relationships and interpersonal relationships.*

When I discussed learning at school with Austin, he shared many of his experiences interacting with his teachers. His learning motivation appeared not to be supported by his relationship with them and his instructional environment. The following quote reflects that his learning experiences have deeply intertwined with his relationship with teachers.

Some teachers, I am ok to sit in their classroom all day, but some teachers, I wish I would walk out of the classroom, never come back. Some teachers just give you

notes and ask you to copy it down, then explains to you quickly. Someone.. will just yell at me, I will be like.. oh my god.. just explains to me. ~Austin

When discussing learning at school with Austin, he frequently mentions that he could not trust his teacher. Clearly, the teacher-student relationship influences his learning motivation and attitudes as well as his learning interests. His caution in establishing a trustful relationship with his school teachers can be observed from the following quote:

She is mad at me... she never let it go... you know what I mean... because of one thing happened long time ago...you know... I got her again this semester.. she kinda acts like she wants to work with me.. but I don't know I can trust her or not.  
~Austin

Another influential factor for teacher-student relationships is how teachers respond to a student's way of learning. Due to the fact that Austin likes to learn in an interactive way, he usually asks teachers or others questions when he is trying to understand something. Therefore, the awareness of his preferred learning approach and experienced difficulties becomes very critical. That is, the teacher may not aware of Austin's preferred learning style, and his behavior history may cause teachers to not take his questions seriously. Consequently, the way teachers respond to Austin's questions can turn out to be a type of learning suppression. In addition, his feeling of being disrespected could result in his perception of being isolated in learning activities. Such a phenomenon can be observed from the following two quotes:

Sometimes, I ask her a question, you know what I mean.. like an important question. And she will take it like I am joking with her or something. Then she will give me back a smart... smart answer. She is just being rude... so rude.. I got mad by the time... and she knows that... but she just keeps pushing.. pushing....just try to get you in trouble. ~Austin

Sometimes, teacher will do some stuff in class, but you gotta know other subjects before doing that. But.. sometimes teacher has their way of explaining things, however, I can't get it. It's just difficult like that. So.. I sometimes just think, I'll talk to my friends instead... I got confused a lot.. I am tired of confusing, so tired of trying... so I will be like... forget it. ~Austin

All these experiences sap Austin's learning motivation. Therefore, an awareness of students' learning interests and preferences is very critical in order for teachers to foster a positive teacher-student relationship.

As Austin shared his school experiences, including interpersonal relationships with teachers and his peers, he seems to not trust anyone at school. However, he likes to go to school to talk to people there. What school has provided for Austin is an environment for him to interact with people. It has led to the way he sees his peers and teachers. This is reflected in how he described his relationship with school teachers, the principal and his classmates,

Like friends... or not friends.. like associate. Somebody you talk to, not even friends.. you don't want to be friends with them.... You say.. 'hi' or 'how are you' to them.. But that's it. You don't talk personal things to them.

Interviewer: so do you trust them at all?

No... you can't trust people out there.

~Austin



Based on Austin's descriptions of his relationship with teachers and peers, a positive teacher-student relationship was not successfully established to support his learning at school. Instead, a lack of awareness of Austin's learning preferences partly resulted in his loss of learning interest. Due to the fact that he recognizes that getting a high school diploma is important to enter the job market, school is a place for you to get that diploma, where you need to meet all these requirements to enter the job market. He tried his best to meet attendance requirements. However, he took a passive attitude toward learning. Therefore, his experiences of having a negative teacher-student relationship have influenced his learning attitudes significantly.

Other than that, he perceives that his ability to receive a high school diploma is greatly determined by the power of school administrators and teachers. From his perspective, grading is primarily determined by his behaviors, that is, whether he follows the instructions and obeys school policies. Consequently, school teachers and the principal hold the power to determine what you do and where you go. As a result, whenever a conflict occurs between a student and a teacher, Austin perceives that the student's side of story is never heard because teacher has the power. This can be illustrated from Austin's responses to questions related to his admired adult at school:

Interviewer: do you have any adult at school you admire or you trust very much who you can get help from them when something happen?

Austin: no... you can go to them.. but they won't gonna do anything about it.. they'll listen to the teacher, but they don't want to hear your side of the story, you know what I mean.. they gonna go to teacher's side of the story.

~Austin

According to Austin's perspective in his teacher-student relationships, it appears that a power struggle between the school and him as well as with teachers is an everyday occurrence.

Although Austin expresses that he dislikes the struggle he has experienced at school, he also indicates that he does not want to be a high school dropout. His determination in being a high school graduate, not a dropout, can be surmised from the following quote:

I just don't want to be a dropout anyway... like I keep telling my buddy, we cannot do anything without a high school diploma. If we get out of high school now, it will be harder for us to get a job.. so.. you need to have a diploma, just to live. ~Austin

From his perspective, getting a job, making money, and taking care of the family are all important responsibilities for his life. To make good living, the first step is to get a diploma from high school, so as to enter the job market successfully. When asked about his support network for his life, he also indicates that his grandmother's and aunt's trust that he can graduate from high school has encouraged him. He stated that,

No matter what happened, I don't want to disappoint my grandma and aunt.. because they believe me. My dad keeps saying that I will be like him.. a high school dropout... I ain't be a dropout .. I don't want to be a dropout anyway. ~Austin

The support from his grandmother and aunt clearly has provided powerful support for Austin to define his learning identity – being a high school graduate.

*Value Conflicts vs. Supported Learning Environment.*

Austin's feeling of being unable to control his own life, such as following certain rules at school, complicates his exhibited behavior and emotional issues. Tracing Austin's family background, his mother works second shift, and his dad was not in his life for a long time. His dad just came back from jail about two years ago. Austin is accustomed to taking care of himself and to behaving like an adult. Therefore, he has considerable freedom and autonomy in his home environment. However, the school environment is structured in a different manner, at least from Austin's perspective. Loss of freedom, respect, and sense of maturity level appear to aggravate his defiant behaviors at school. Rudy described that,

Austin is more mature at home than at school. So he feels that he has more freedom and more responsibility at home. When he goes to school, he feels he has to take down a few levels, got all rules to follow. And if you deviate, even for an inch, you got reprimanded. So he got more defiant and more disrespectful of authority.

~ Rudy

All of these factors seem to be influencing his relationship with teachers and other authority figures at school, his interpretation of school performance, and his school identity.

*School/Family/agency collaboration.*

In terms of collaborating with teachers and family, Rudy indicates that "constant contact" is a key to establish a positive collaborative relationship with both families and the school system. Due to the fact that there is no coordinated team involving all three parties, Austin's parents tend to not involve Rudy when they deal with disciplinary

actions taken by the school. At the same time, the school system or teachers may not be able to provide effective services for Austin's emotional/behavioral disabilities. As a result, the school authority may take severe discipline as the approach to address Austin's behavior and emotional issues. So, the disciplinary actions are very likely too harsh for him, especially when there is no other out-of-school professionals involved in the decision-making process. Rudy indicates that the most difficult part of collaborating with Austin's family is communication. Because Austin's parents sometimes do not update him with what has happened to Austin at school, it is difficult for him to advocate for Austin in a timely manner.

Because Austin receives mental health services at the agency and Lumbee culture still views a mental illness label as a tremendously stigmatizing, the school may not be aware of his mental health needs. That, in turn, may contribute to Austin's misbehaviors at school. Rudy stated that,

As in this culture, people are afraid that others think they are crazy, so some parents don't want their children labeled with mental illness. ~Rudy

Another important factor influencing family-school relationship is the system of learning supports for student needs. Austin needs extensive support for his emotional and behavioral disabilities. However, the tolerance level of teachers seems very low. That has greatly damaged the relationship between the school and the family. The case manager also indicated that the school sometimes only emphasizes the long-term goal

such as being a doctor or lawyer; however, for at-risk kids, it is a goal too far removed to be meaningful. He further stated that,

Sometimes they expect students to meet where the school is at, instead of where students are at. They got the bar right there, then asking students to meet that bar. They should go down to help the student along the way to get to that bar. But they don't do that. That's what I get from the school system. ~Rudy

When the goal set by school is difficult to reach and the family does not emphasize education, low teacher expectations match with family expectations. As a result, students may not perceive receiving an education as important. In Austin's case, his family has a long history of doing construction work. Receiving an education does not seem important to the family, especially for his dad, even though Austin understands that graduating from high school is critical for getting a job. A negative family-school collaborative relationship only reinforces that receiving education is not that important for students because of the value conflict between the family and the school. Rudy speaks to this when he further elaborates reasons causing students to drop out of school:

1)Parents, either they don't have education or don't emphasize education at early ages; 2) opportunities to make money. When they can make 2000, 3000, 4000 a month at 17 or 18, they don't see the importance of receiving education. Plus, they don't need to worry about insurance or retirement plan yet. ~Rudy

Therefore, without positive family collaboration and culture awareness, students can face school challenges, a negative teacher-student relationship, and learning difficulties and may choose to drop out of the school, unless they have different identity in their own mind. It can be observed in Austin's case. Without the powerful support

from his aunt and grandmother and an identity of being different from his dad, a high school dropout, it is very possible that he could become a high school dropout himself.

### **Richie's Story.**

#### *Programs and services received by students.*

Richie was identified with a developmental delay in early ages and has been eligible for special education services since elementary school. He also is identified with an Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). He is currently 16 years old, and he is supposed to be in 10<sup>th</sup> grade. Due to the fact that he had problems getting accustomed to the high school learning environment last year and missed many school days because of his medical conditions, he was retained in 9<sup>th</sup> grade. Richie's mother indicates that he was in an inclusion class and getting assistance from EC teachers during class. However, the classroom support from EC teachers was limited. The challenges Richie experienced last year can be illustrated with the following quote by his mother:

The experiences I had with him at school is EC does not fit every student. Like him, I want to keep him like a regular student, then get help from EC. Then you get downfalls. Because he learns slower, then you don't have teacher who is able to work with him whenever he needs help. That is the reason why we change to the accelerated, because it is more one-on-one. ~Richie's mother

In order to address the issue with Richie's absence and education placement, an emergency IEP meeting was held last semester and the IEP team decided that Richie should be placed in the Learning Accelerated Program (LAP). This Learning Accelerated Program (LAP) is a program designed to meet individual needs through one-

on-one instruction within the school system. Richie began going to the Learning Accelerated Program this semester.

Regarding other services, Richie's case manager Larry described that Richie has received case manager services, psychiatrist therapies, developmental disability (DD) services, and community advocacy program (CAP) services. In other words, Richie has received services from multiple agencies; case manager service is to assist Richie and the family to coordinate the services available from these multiple agencies. Based on Larry's explanation, both DD services and CAP services are available for individuals identified with an intellectual disability or developmental disability. Richie's case manager described types of out-of-school services provided for Richie:

He has been identified as having an oppositional defiant disorder and mental retardation. So he is very defiant. He is a DD recipient. He does have support with them after school hours. He also have CAP services available at after school hours. So he does have worker to work with him. He has goals he has to work towards. At our agency, we also develop a Person-Centered Plan of Care (PCP). Under which, various types of goals are specified there. We follow this PCP plan to provide services for all out clients. ~Larry

*Teacher-student relationship and interpersonal relationships.*

While discussing what learning challenges and difficulties Richie has experienced at school, his relationship with teachers and teacher expectations appear to influence his learning greatly. Because of his past learning experiences, he does not like to speak out loud if he is not sure whether he has worded his response correctly. His mother describes his personality:

He only like to talk to friends. Like with you, if he did not know he words it right or not, he will hold back. When he is comfortable with somebody, he will ask questions. Like with his case manager, he still does not like to talk to him. I think it's his way of learning something. If it is not the right way, he would rather not to say anything. ~Richie's mother

As a result, whether he trusts a person becomes very critical. If he does not trust the person, he behaves like he does not care about learning at all. Yet, he just does not want to ask that person. This observation is reflected from the conversation between Richie and me,

Interviewer: If you don't know how to complete the work, would you ask the teacher to explain to you again?

Richie: no. it didn't work. I just don't wanna ask. He did not care. I would just sleep on the paper or call my mother to pick me up. ~Richie

When Richie was asked about his favorite teacher, he replied that there was an EC teacher who helped him a lot and understood him. Based on Richie's perception, understanding his learning difficulties, caring about his feelings, and helping him to find an alternative way to complete school work are important characteristics of a teacher he can trust. His descriptions of the teacher he used to trust very much included these thoughts:

Interviewer: Why do you feel like you can learn from that teacher?

Richie: because he helps me, understands me. And spend time with me. I like it when somebody helps me. But generally I don't like school, because they don't help me. But mother said, I have to finish the school. ~Richie



Therefore, whether there is a trustful teacher at school to help Richie appears to be a major concern. This reflection also corresponds to Larry's observation of Richie's problems at school:

For the difficulties Richie encountered or my other clients encountered, I would not say the school per se. I would say the teachers, or certain teachers at school, or principal. I think they don't like teachers basically. Some teachers just want them to follow the rules... keep telling them to sit down.. they don't want to sit down.(laugh) I'll say, teachers should understand where students are at, and give them work they can complete. For Richie, the issue with the school is mainly about the teacher at school or social worker. ~Larry

In terms of relationships with others, including school staff and peers, whether Richie trusts them and is willing to build a relationship with them is still a major issue. From his perspective, being understood by others is very important. However, he expressed that he did not feel he could be himself at school very much. That is the major reason he does not like the school. Therefore, his relationships with teachers and other people at school partly determine his level of satisfaction at school. Based on Larry's perspective, Richie has a good support network in his home environment. Thus, when he encounters difficulties at school, his first action often is to call his mother to pick him up. What school means to him is that he can get a diploma and go to barber school, as this is his future plan. His frustration with the school can be observed from the following quote:

I feel frustrated all the times. I just wish to get out of here soon, so I can go to barber school. ~Richie

*Learning difficulties and challenges.*

Other than the interpersonal relationships with teachers and other people at school, difficulties experienced by Richie concern whether instruction and academic tasks are appropriate. This issue can be observed from the case manager's observation of school challenges experienced by Richie. He stated that,

They would have to base on my client's diagnosis and natural function level to design the work. My thing will be, modify their assignments, make sure you give the student the work they can do. Number one suggestion... give students the modified assignment so they can complete. You know, on their level. ~Larry

Larry further indicates that many case managers at the agency constantly get complaints about academic assignments. Many parents complain that teachers sometimes do not give students an assignment they can complete, and it frequently increases their frustration level and decreases their learning motivation. In Richie's case, it is very easy for him to quit working on his assignment. He stated that,

I would try for couple minutes, if I don't know how to do it, I would quit and go to sleep. ~Richie

According to Richie's mother, it is much easier for Richie to give up learning or completing the academic task since he entered high school compared to when he was in middle and elementary school. Whether a competency-supported environment is provided for Richie clearly is an influential factor in his satisfaction with his learning experiences. His previous learning experiences in an inclusive class provide a good

example portraying Richie's learning difficulties, which can be observed from the following conversation:

Interviewer: From the time you go to regular class, is there anything that has made you feel learning is difficult?

Richie: Yes.. mostly is math. Because I can't calculate fast. Sometimes it's hard to figure questions out.

Interviewer: So usually, when will be the point that you feel like giving up?

Richie: Well. I would try about couple minutes, then I would get mad.

Interviewer: Can you remember anytime in the past when you try to figure questions out and you successfully made it?

Richie: Mm... in middle school. The teacher helped me.

Interviewer: So if the teacher helps you out, you would like to try to complete it?

Richie: Yeah. I need teacher to help me out. The teacher doesn't care.

~Richie

The learning difficulties he described happen often based on Richie's perception.

As the frustration level escalates, he uses the strategy of avoiding. Richie described that,

When I feel frustrated, I would just stop trying and sleep on it. Or I would just call my mother to pick me up at school, then go home. ~Richie

In addition, because of his medical conditions, Richie has been absent between 30 and 40 days. Consequently, his school learning opportunities is at least 6 to 7 weeks fewer than others. Under such circumstances, the IEP team also suggested that homebound instruction should be provided. Homebound instruction can be defined as instruction services delivered within student's home environment by school personnel (Zirkel, 2003; Patterson, & Tullis, 2007). For years, homebound instruction services were considered as the most restrictive placement because students are missing opportunities for interacting with their peers (Council for Exceptional Children, 1997). It

is very important for the IEP team to determine such placement for students with disabilities. In Richie's case, his medical condition may prevent him from learning at school sometimes; however, he has capabilities to learn from school environment when appropriate accommodations are provided. Therefore, the suggestion recommended by the IEP team may not be an appropriate recommendation. Further, it would further limit Richie's learning opportunities, and violate Richie's education rights.

Because Richie learns more slowly than other students, he usually needs teacher support or other classroom accommodations to assist him in completing academic tasks. However, the classroom accommodations for Richie seem very limited. Test and assignment accommodations such as extended time are used. Alternative ways to complete assignment or incorporating assistive technology devices such as computer use were not provided for Richie. Although not all accommodations are appropriate for him, it appears that more accommodations could be used to meet Richie's needs.

Taking assignments as an example, Richie indicates that he usually has difficulty completing assignments given by his teachers. Similar to the strategy he uses in class, he simply does not try to complete such assignments. Because teachers may not give Richie clear expectations, Richie says that it is ok for him to not complete assignments.

When asked to compare his old program and the new program, (that is, Learning Accelerated Program (LAP)), he expresses that one-to-one instruction and the computer lessons help him greatly. He states that,

The work is much easier. Because it's one-on-one, and you got computer. You got to do all the work on computer. Back in the old class, they don't use computer in class. They don't use it. ~Richie

*School/Family/Agency Collaboration.*

In terms of family collaboration, trust is a major issue influencing the relationship between Richie's family and the school. Because Richie and his parents had a very positive relationship with his special education teacher during his middle school years, they trusted school professionals. For example, whether Richie could attend school regularly was unpredictable. Therefore, the special education teacher at his middle school collaborated with Richie's mother to help him to not fall behind in academics and meet school requirements for attendance. However, when Richie entered the high school, such accommodations were not available. In addition, school professionals urged Richie's mother to comply with school requirements to avoid further actions being taken by the school. Larry described Richie's mother's emotional status:

Because Richie has missed so many days of school, the school social worker told mother that they want to take it to the court, which caused mother to be upset very much. They also call for an emergent IEP meeting. She telephones me and she is scared of going to the IEP meeting. The issue with the social worker and teachers happened for couple times. Therefore, every time the school calls her, she will call me and ask me to accompany her to the school. ~Larry

Because such conflict has occurred, the relationship between the family and the school is getting more and more adversarial. Both Richie and Richie's mother express that the communication with teachers and other school professionals has not been easy. Richie perceives that teachers and other professionals may not care about him. However,

his mother attributes the conflict to school professionals' low level of understanding and cultural awareness. She stated that,

Richie used to have a special education teacher who spend a lot of time with him and understands him very much. We had no problem at all. But, when we enter high school, it is a totally different world. They don't know who he is. They don't know how he learns, what he likes to do, or how he will get angry. Things just turn out not right. So I just want to change the program for him. I hope he can graduate from school and actually learn something from the school. ~Richie's mother

In addition, whether the IEP has been implemented is another important issue, and it is also a major reason causing conflicts between Richie's family and the school.

Although the IEP team discussed all the accommodations, instructional strategies, and required program supports thoroughly, Larry indicates that service planning is not the major issue. He further explains that school professionals are great for allowing parents and other members of the IEP team to participate in the discussion; however, whether the IEP has been implemented carefully may be the problem. He described the situation in this quote:

I would not say the problem is with the IEP meeting. As far as accommodations, least restrictive environment, or other support, I think they have gone pretty well. The problem is once the IEP is done, how to follow up with the school. The state has changed the rule. I try to visit the student at school. I guess I should do more visiting to make sure the IEP is followed through. But the bottom line is, I think the EC teacher should make sure the IEP is adhered. ~Larry

Richie's mother also indicates that the scheduled weekly services may not be available all the time. For example, Richie may need to see the speech therapist twice a week; however, sometimes he may only receive that service once a week. Larry further

expressed that the situation has happened to his other clients as well. Such failure on the part of professionals has caused parents to feel frustrated collaborating with the school system.

In terms of collaborating with the agency, Richie's mother indicates that the case management service has been very beneficial for them. She stated that,

Larry is very helpful. As sometimes I did not know where to get help, if I call Larry, he usually tries to help me to find the right place to go. Sometimes, he even help me to talk to them. Regarding Richie at school, he also helps me to talk to the school what we need. We have a very good relationship and it has been very helpful.  
~Richie's mother

From Richie's mother's perspective, helping her to communicate with the school and find possible solutions to the issue encountered is very important. Larry notes that gaining a level of trust from the family is a key to a positive collaborative relationship. He further indicates that this trust is built upon the effort of trying to understand each other.

### **Randy's Story.**

#### *Programs and services received by student.*

Randy is 16 years old and has been identified with a mild intellectual disability, Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and Oppositional Defiant Disorder (ODD). His case manager, Jacky, explained that he previously was received community support and had a one-to-one worker with him at school. However, the funding sponsoring community support services was cut last year. Therefore, his support changed to targeted case management services after last October.

In terms of programs and services at school, he has been placed in a self-contained classroom for students identified with intellectual and developmental disabilities. However, due to a shortage of special education professionals, the self-contained classroom includes students with severe, moderate, and mild intellectual or developmental disabilities. Randy also participates in the occupational course of the study (OCS) so that he attends school in the morning and goes to a job site in the afternoon. However, Jacky indicates that the community support services Randy previously received were better for meeting his special needs. He stated that,

They did psychological diagnosis, and once the psychological diagnosis was completed, it was determined, he was mild mentally retarded. So, therefore, he switched from community support to targeted case manager services.. It seems... the community support is a little better for him. You know... we are at the point trying to get him developmental therapy, from where we try to address his behaviors and home issues. to make it better for him. ~Jacky

However, the quality of received services appears to be influenced significantly by his family. Jacky expressed his concerns that Randy does not receive services consistently because his family and he seem to not place priority on receiving services for his disability. He described this in the following quote:

With Randy, it is better for him to be in school with his medication, more focused, and his behaviors are minimized. If he gets his medication, we talked about it couple months ago, we scheduled an appointment, they didn't show. I talked with the doctor, let them know what's going on. She agreed to write one prescription without seeing him. Then we scheduled another appointment again. No show again. So he goes without medication. ~Jacky



The example reflects that the family factor should be taken into consideration, as both parents and Randy appear to not follow the service plan consistently.

*Family factors.*

Randy has two sisters and one brother and lives with his mother and grandmother. His grandmother is his guardian. Both his mother and grandmother are identified with intellectual disabilities. As a result, their participation in school related activities, including Randy's service planning and implementation, has been very limited. When asked about whether his mother and grandmother were involved with IEP meeting, Randy said, "No! I am the one dealing with what happens at school." Consequently, the communication between the family and the school has not been clear. This can be observed from Jacky's description of the teacher's responses pertaining to communicating with Randy's parents. He stated that,

The teacher said, they tried to contact the family, but they got no responses. So it's like, they feel they have reached out to the family. But they did not get any reply, so they do not want to reach out anymore. ~Jacky

However, this communication barrier also results from the different roles played by Randy, his mother, and his grandmother within the family. Jacky describes their roles in the family in the following quote,

I don't want to say he raises himself, but it seems that Randy grows up on his own. Instead of he listens to his mother and grandma, they listen to him, because he is the one getting more education, and the oldest son in the family. ~Jacky

Therefore, instead of mother and grandmother make important decisions for the family, Randy plays the major role in determining final decisions for the family. Without understanding the family background, the communication barrier between the family and the school is not surprising. Jacky notes,

I think the communication barrier does exist between the family and the school. The family is unique, although it may not be that unique in this community. But it is a different type of family we can think of. It is easy to overlook them. ~Jacky

From Randy's perception, the teacher is always the one who gets him into trouble. As a result, he dislikes his school life very much, and his unpleasant experiences have caused him to think about dropping out of school.

The teacher, I have four subjects with her, she is just trying to get rid of me, get me mad, so she can kick me out of her classroom. Sometimes, I wish I don't have to go back to school anymore. ~Randy

When asked further about why he continues to choose to stay at school, he replied,

My man, Jacky, he is my brother, he told me not to do that. I want to get a job, hope to be a basketball player in the future. So I should stay at school. I don't want my teacher to get rid of me like that. ~Randy

From conversation with Randy, it appears that he needs a role model or someone he respects to guide him. However, within his family, he plays a different role. Randy's need to have a role model is reflected from Jacky's observation. He stated that,

I think like having a big brother, that's what he really needs. There is a minister... he comes to visit sometimes... I think it keeps Randy out of the trouble. Even the teacher says that, whenever the minister or priest came to visit him, his behaviors at school are much better the next couple of days after his visit. ~Jacky

Given the fact that Randy does not have a mentor and that he is making family decisions, he lives in his own world. He perceives that everything should follow his will and his way; otherwise, he perceives it as wrong. This perception often is the cause of the conflict between Randy and his teacher at school, as illustrated when Randy described her.

Randy: She is the type... every new person comes to her class... she just rid their face... and me.. I am not gonna let her do that... she just doing wrong things... one time... I just say one bad word... and she said... you can put hands on me if you want to... she writes me on the referral... said... That's why I don't please with that women... that's the stuff she do... she just ...to me... she got mental problem... like she just let go insane or something... that's the way it goes....

Interviewer: do you see the same thing happening between the teacher and other students or just you particularly?

Randy: just me... yes... just me... she doesn't say to nobody else.. she doesn't bother nobody else.. but me...

Interviewer: why do you think that?

Randy: number 1: I won't do the thing she tells me to ... and half the things is not right...

Interviewer: why you think it's not right?

Randy: because she wants me to do this and that to other people... and it's not right... she just want me to do the wrong purpose thing...

~Randy

From Randy's perspective, he did not trust and believe the teacher. Consequently, if he did not like what the teacher asked him to do or did not understand the purpose of doing the task, he did not perceive these tasks as right things to do. Jacky also described the problem Randy encountered at school in the following quote:

I think part of it is he can't get his way. he can't get his way... I won't say... teachers all the time do things they shouldn't... but if he can't get his way... it's gonna be a problem. ~Jacky

Observing Randy's emotional responses to teachers and the family background, providing an autonomy-supported environment appears to be very critical for Randy's learning. Due to the fact that he is accustomed to making decisions in his home environment, he believes that he has a lot of knowledge. Therefore, it is important to utilize his perceived knowledge to communicate with Randy regarding academic tasks and school rules.

*Teacher-student relationship and interpersonal relationships.*

From Randy's perspective, his teacher is the major reason for his dissatisfaction with school. He described his conflict with her this way:

Yeah... she has suspended me for nothing, she said to everybody that I said, I will kill her. She is the type you must do what she told you... how would you feel... if I am a teacher and I just write a referral letter and put in your record against you.. how would you feel right now? Would you be mad like me or be frustrated? I am pretty sure that she has turned me in for nothing sometimes. She told me about it... she just write me into the record so I can go home... that's what she do... I don't know what I can do about it. ~Randy

He further indicates that he was suspended 10 times last year. Randy perceives all the suspensions are the result of his teacher's efforts to remove him from her class. The relationship between him and his teacher is clearly very adversarial. When asked whether he trusts the school teacher or other professionals at school, he replied that "*I would not trust anyone at school, because they only take teacher's side.*" Such a

negative teacher-student relationship also can be observed from his responses to questions related to learning. Whenever Randy is asked about learning in the classroom, all his answers are always about how his teacher treats him at school. The teacher-student relationship is clearly an influential factor affecting Randy's perception of schooling experiences.

Regarding Randy's relationship with other students at school, he does not perceive that he has friends at school. He describes his relationship with others in the following quote:

I do not have any friends at school. I can just be myself. I ain't need any friends. They are not my friends. I got friends. But they are not in the same school with me. I just like to play basketball. I play on my own. I ain't need friends at school.  
~Randy

From his description, his interpersonal relationships at school form another important issue and also may be an important factor affecting his dissatisfaction. When Randy was asked about maintaining relationships with others in the school setting, his confusion is apparent:

I know I have a short temper. But people just tries to push me to the limit. That's why I always get mad at them. Sometimes they got scared. But I ain't do anything. That's fine. I can be myself and do whatever I want. I don't care about them.  
~Randy

Randy's confusion reflects his problems communicating or socializing with others at school. Consequently, he has been gradually isolated within the school community.

Jacky further describes his observation of Randy's school issues in the following quote,

Randy, needs some support for his socialization skills, and his anger management skills. He also needs great support for his interpersonal relationship skills. As when he is at home, everyone lets him do whatever he likes to do. He does not need to worry about his way of talking. But, at school, he will have challenges in talking to others appropriately. ~Jacky

Therefore, it is very critical to address his needs through specially designed intervention because of his unique family background and special needs.

### **Summary**

From illustrations of three student participants' schooling experiences, several important issues are observed. First, the relationship, either the teacher-student relationship or the collaborative relationship between the family and the school, have influenced participants' perspective concerning their learning experiences. All three participants, their case managers, and the parent shared similar perception regarding the struggles and communication difficulties they have experienced when they interacted with teachers or other school professionals. Clearly, they suffered from having a negative relationship with teachers or school professionals. As a result, student participants place greater emphasis on interpersonal relationship instead of learning when sharing their schooling experiences. Therefore, based on participants' descriptions in this study, building a positive relationship among the family, the student, and the teacher is very important.

Second, all student participants have experienced violations of education rights because of the decision made by school professionals. Violations concerning

inappropriate disciplinary actions, least restrictive placement determination, and IEP planning and implementation can all be observed from stories of participants in this study.

Third, value conflicts between the school and the family is also another important factor influencing student participants' perspective in terms of their schooling experiences. In stories of participants in this study, two participants were allowed to make decisions as adults within their home environment. They shared decision power with their parents or guardians in nearly all family matters. When they were instructed to follow school policy and rules without questioning, they started to feel frustrated and struggled. So, the conflict happened. As a result, these conflicts have influenced students' perception of schooling experiences greatly. When teachers were not able to recognize their special needs, these students started to resist what were believed as right within the school environment. The teacher-student relationship was also significantly affected by their unmet psychological needs.

Therefore, whether students' needs are recognized and addressed is the key. However, in this study, teachers or school professionals were unable to recognize the special need of these students and were unable to provide appropriate program and services. Further, teachers did not address the issue in a more culturally sensitive manner. When all of these factors come together, students' negative perspective on their schooling experiences is not surprising.

## **CHAPTER V**

### **DISCUSSION**

This chapter is divided into four sections: discussion, recommendations, conclusion, and future research direction.

#### **Discussion**

The main purpose of this study was to explore the schooling experiences of Lumbee Indian students with high incidence disabilities to identify what factors influence their various engagement levels. Specifically, participants shared their experiences concerning the contextual challenges that may negatively or positively affect their schooling experiences and determine their willingness to stay in school. Discussion regarding overall phenomenon will be organized by five themes: (1) Program and services received by students; (2) Teacher-student relationships; (3) Value conflicts; (4) School/Family/Agency collaboration; (5) Supported learning environment.

#### **Theme 1: Programs and Services Received by Students**

Concerning program and services received by students, participants in this study appeared not receiving an appropriate set of program and services at school. All participants reported that they were dissatisfied with their schooling experiences at their current school. Based on the finding of this study, programs and services provided for students should be able to meet their needs in social, behavioral, and learning needs. In this study, participants' special needs appeared not be addressed adequately at school.



This finding is consistent to previous research conducting in the population of students with emotional and behavioral disabilities, which has highlighted the great need to improve education practice for this student population (Beaudoin, Knuth, & Benner, 2008; Lane, Carter, Pierson, & Glaeser, 2006; Nelson, Benner, Lane, & Smith, 2004).

For the purpose to meet diverse needs of this student population, it is very crucial that school personnel consider the possible benefits to students before they make either a disciplinary decision or change the placement for students. Research has indicated that making a decision to determine an appropriate placement for students with emotional and behavioral needs is particularly difficult and the need for furthering the training of special education professionals is great (Beaudoin, Knuth, & Benner, 2008). Such finding is also reflected in this study.

In order to address students' problem behaviors, school professionals in this study appeared to be more likely to make disciplinary decision based on administrative convenience or isolation of "problem behavior". As a result, suspension becomes a frequent disciplinary measure to use to prevent students' problem behaviors. However, students' behavioral, emotional, and learning needs were not adequately addressed during the process. Instead, student resistance was escalated through the disciplinary process. Katsiyannis and Williams (1998) suggested that the entrance and exit regulations of an alternative program should be clear to prevent an inappropriate placement based on administrative convenience and denial of education services for particular student population.

This study has found that disciplinary decision making played a huge factor influencing students' willingness to engage with learning activities. Harris (2008) indicated that students' schooling experiences is the key factor determining student engagement. In this study, student engagement is defined as *a continual decision making process of every individual student in everyday life, and the process is strongly influenced by multidimensional psychological experiences related to intrinsic motivation, self perception, and a perceived relationship with peers, school professionals, and the surrounding school environment*. This finding has reflected that students' experiences in the disciplinary process has played a key factor in their everyday decision making process. Because of their gradually developed distrust with school professionals, their resistance to school policy and school authority, at the same time, gradually escalated. So, their observed low level of school engagement is not surprising.

## **Theme 2: Teacher-Student Relationship**

The professional literature has documented that relatedness is a strong predictor of school engagement, especially emotional engagement (Furrer & Skinner, 2003; Kuperminc, Blatt, Shahr, Henrich, & Leadbetter, 2004; Skinner, Furrer, Marchand, & Kindermann, 2008). In this study, relatedness was defined as *a connectedness to the academic community, including peers and school professionals*. The results of this study also indicated that the relationship with school teachers played an influential role determining their sense of relatedness to the academic community.

All participants reported that teachers or other school professionals were the main reason for their negative perception of their schooling experiences. For example, one

participant, Randy, attributed his history of being suspended to his continual conflicts with school teachers. Another participant, Richie, indicated that the teacher had low expectations and did not care how he learned. The other participant, Austin, suggested that the school tended to use power to isolate him and push him away from the learning environment. From their perspectives, whether they have a caring teacher appears to be a major concern in their school experiences.

In this study, genuine teacher-student relationships and positive teacher-student interactions are not present in students' perception of their schooling experiences. Although Richie mentioned that he had a great special education teacher during his middle school years, his high school experiences were not the same. Research has indicated that negative school experiences and a lack of caring and meaningful relationships with school personnel usually decrease students' motivation to attend school (Epstein, 1992; Hansen & Toso, 2007; Lee and Ryser, 2009). The finding of this study also confirms that a positive relationship with teachers plays an influential factor determining students' willingness to attend to school. From student participants' perspective, their schooling experiences have been frustrating because of their negative relationships with teachers or other professionals.

It should be noted that the interpretation of caring between teachers and students can differ (Thompson, 2007); this point is confirmed in this study. For example, one participant, Randy, indicated that his teacher did not provide him with instructional support in the classroom. However, from case manager's perspective, the teacher reported that she had tried her best to meet the special needs of the student participant,

even though it differs from his perception. It appeared that the teacher has made observations of Randy's learning conditions. However, given the fact that he had negative experiences with the teacher, he paid greater attention to his relationship with the teacher than the instruction. Harris (2008) suggested that the students' schooling experiences is also crucial to student engagement. This partly explains why Randy paid greater attention to his interpersonal relationship. From his perspective, how teacher responded to him represents whether the teacher understood his needs and was willing to help him. As he has had negative experiences in interacting with teachers, he perceived that a good learning environment should accompany a caring teacher-student relationship. When he cannot sense that the teacher demonstrates caring characteristics he believed she should have, he shifted his attention to the teacher's behaviors in the classroom. To better address Randy's problem behavior, teachers might need to explore the nature of their relationship with Randy and to further improve his engagement level.

Another example was illustrated in Richie's story. Because Richie felt frustrated with learning easily, how to manage an environment allowing him to understand and practice the learned knowledge successful becomes very important. The findings of this study suggest that addressing students' learning needs in a cultural responsive manner such as providing appropriate scaffolding opportunities for them to be successful is one crucial expression of a caring teacher. This is also consistent to previous research on characteristics of a caring teacher (Nieto, 2004).

In this study, a gap existed between the teachers' and students' perception of the teacher's role. From student perspective, teachers ought to assist them to be successful in

the classroom, care about their learning and life, and respect them as individuals. For example, when one student participant, Austin, raised questions in class, the teacher thought that he was just making a joke and responded to his questions in a sarcastic manner. This resulted in his perception of being disrespected and ignored. Research has indicated that teacher caring should be demonstrated by behaviors that help to enhance students' potential, to foster their self-esteem, to value their opinions, and to respect them (Knesting, 2008; Coburn & Nelson). This study has found that, once teacher did not demonstrate caring characteristics such as listening, respecting, and trusting, it damaged the trustworthiness of the teacher and further undermined the teacher-student relationship. This corresponds to Noddings' (2005) definition; she believes that a caring relationship is a reciprocal relationship between the two parties. That means the person who is being cared for must acknowledge the act of caring so that a relationship can be formed. Clearly, students' need of relatedness was not met through the interaction between teachers and students.

### **Theme 3: Value Conflicts**

In this study, we also found that a negative teacher-student relationship was significantly influenced by value conflicts between the school and the family culture, and different perspectives concerning the role of teachers. Referring back to the education history of Lumbee Indians, the mainstream culture at Robeson County Schools is still believed to be Caucasian culture, even though Lumbee Indian is one of the major student groups. Critical pedagogy theory views schooling as a form of politics. That is, school tends to use a political way to introduce students to a particular form of social life

(McLaren, 1994). In the case of Lumbee Indians, the school was designed to introduce Indian students the Caucasian culture, to assimilate them into Caucasian culture. From student perspectives, school rules and policies are developed from mainstream culture. They are not familiar with these rules and standards of what is right or wrong. As a result, such value conflict results in their inappropriate behaviors. For example, some of Randy's past suspensions were because of his inappropriate dress at school. Even though they may be familiar with these predetermined rules, they may resist following them. Thus, these problem behaviors may be interpreted as resistance to a particular form of life introduced by the school and teachers.

In many Native American groups including Lumbee Indians, extended family, mutual respect and cooperation are all important life elements (Zastrow & Kirst-Ashman, 2010). In the stories of participants in this study, mutual respect is fully expressed in social interactions among student participants and their family members. For example, Randy played a crucial decision maker in all family matters; Austin's mom and grandmother allowed him to make decision as adults. Given the fact that their family members respect their children's knowledge and life experiences, their freedom and decision power in terms of family matters are greater.

Freire (1998) indicates that critical learners are engaged with a continual transformation process where they can take ownership of knowledge construction. That is, learning requires the learner to make adventures in the learning process, to absorb the learned knowledge, and to gradually develop his or her own set of knowledge. In analyzing the relationship between student participants and their family members, they

appeared to be engaged with a continual transformed learning process in which they share decision making power and take important responsibilities. These students make adventures through their unique learning process embedded within their life experiences.

However, these students' life experiences, learned knowledge through their transformed learning process, did not receive the same respect from school professionals, those who hold the power governing school structure. In this study, teachers, at least according to students' case managers' reports, tended to use control-oriented strategies to reduce students' misbehaviors such as suspension or sending the student home, including when students argued for making alternative choices in learning. Udvari-Solner, Villa and Thousand (2005) indicate that it is important to provide multiple means of allowing students to engage with academic tasks. Participants indicate that there is usually one choice available for them.

As a result, a struggle concerning knowledge construction and being respected as a knowledgeable person occurred. Under the controlled-oriented school context, students were not viewed as critical learners. Instead, they were identified as passive recipients of organized knowledge from teachers about the reality of the society. Different ways of learning thus present in different dimensions of students' life experiences. As a result, their struggles with school experiences and social interactions with school professionals continued to occur, especially in the structured, controlled-oriented setting. Perspectives of case manager participants were correspondent with this observation. They indicated that the more structured, control-oriented context seemed fail to consider the family culture of these students.

Freire (1998) describes that current education practice is guided by the narrative relation between teachers and students. That means, this relationship involves a narrating subject (the teacher) and listening object (the students). He portrays the challenge in current education practice in the following paragraph,

The teacher talks about reality as if it were motionless, static, compartmentalized, and predictable. Or else he expounds on a topic completely alien to the existential experience of the students. His task is to fill the students with the contents of his narration – contents which are detached from reality, disconnected from the totality that engendered them and could give them significance. (Freire, 1998, p.71.)

Therefore, when students try to challenges a set of predetermined school rules based on mainstream cultural values, the control-oriented context starts to react and to suppress such curiosity. This can be observed from students' describing of their resistance concerning the narrating relations between them and their teachers.

#### **Theme 4: School/Family/Agency Collaboration**

In this study, we found that school-family collaboration and school-agency collaboration were not happening much. Researchers reported that interagency collaboration rarely happened in school settings for students with emotional disabilities (Wagner, Friend, Bursuck, Kutash, Duchnowski, Sumi & Epstein, 2006). This point is confirmed in this study as well. Based on participants' descriptions, agency and school are two different entities. The collaboration would occur when the teacher made contacts with the case manager, or the case manager made great efforts to follow up with the teacher. There is no structure to support the collaboration between the agency and the school.



Concerning school-family collaboration, parent involvement is the key element in establishing a positive school-family collaborative relationship. However, despite No Child Left Behind (NCLB) specifically pointed out how parent involvement should be address in school improvement plan, research indicated that parent involvement remains an area needing more improvement (Speth, Saifer, & Forehand, 2008). This is consistent to the finding of this study. For example, Randy indicated that his guardians and his mom were rarely invited by the school to participate in any school activities.

Based on case managers' descriptions, all parents of student participants reported having communication difficulties when they attended IEP meeting or discussed with teachers concerning their children's education at school. In Randy's case, the mother and grandma both are identified with a developmental disability. Communicating with school professionals has been a significant challenge for them. Given the fact that school teachers were not able to manage a positive relationship with the family and lack of an awareness of the family structure, the IEP plan and accommodations designed for Randy appeared not meeting his special needs. However, this issue appeared not well-communicated between the family and the school based on case manager's perspective. An earlier research suggested that many parents reported having difficulties to speak to school personnel, and parent input seemed not seriously taken by the school (Quellette, Briscoe, & Tyson, 2004). This observation is confirmed in this study as well.

Observing from participants' descriptions, these schools seemed still valuing the professional knowledge of school professionals more than parent input. This is correspondent to earlier research conducted by Kalyanpur and Harry (2004). They

pointed out that an important issue observed in the field is that researchers and practitioners possess the privilege of that knowledge in providing appropriate education for students with disabilities, and parents therefore become passive recipients of knowledge (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2004). For example, Richie's mom reported that she had to make great efforts to change Richie's placement, as the IEP team once suggested homebound instruction was the appropriate placement for him.

Two parents, described by case managers, believed that they had limited knowledge about the IEP. Thus, when an IEP meeting was called for, they were usually there to listen what school wanted them to do. Under such circumstances, parents or the family were very likely to be intimidated by the school teachers and the IEP team. This is also correspondent to case managers' observations. All case managers have reported that they all have similar experiences to help families to resolve IEP controversies with the school system. Such narrating interactive pattern between the parents and teachers was constantly appeared in the decision-making process for service planning from participants' perspective.

Consequently, this study found that the trust between the family and the school was not successfully established and the school-family relationships perceived by study participants were distressing. Olivos, Gallagher, and Aguilar (2010) suggested that the first step to address collaborative barriers between the school and the family is to identify who defines the nature of the relationship. They further indicated that teachers or school professionals who tend to be school or community centered are generally the one who determine parameters of the school-family relationship. This is also reflected in this

study. For example, when Austin returned to school after he withdrew from school in the previous semester, the IEP team kept delaying rewriting his IEP plan, which impacted his school performance in a great deal. Austin failed all his classes in the midterm exam. This implied that the priority of the teacher or the school was not to consider the benefit of the child. When teachers or the IEP team behaved in this manner, the nature of the school-family relationship was partly determined. As a result, the trust and positive collaborative relationship were hard to observe in their relationship.

In order to address the collaborative issue observed in this study, it is very crucial for school professionals and the IEP team to change their stance to student or family centered. This also corresponds to the suggestions proposed by case managers. Friend and Cook (2007) put greater emphasis on the condition of parity in establishing a positive collaborative relationship. That is, opinions of all parties of the collaborative team should be equally valued, and all members are willing to use appropriate knowledge and skills to work together. However, what we have observed in this study is that parents are not perceived as critical collaborators in service planning and implementation. Lack of such awareness is very likely to contribute to a negative school-family relationship. Clearly, collaborative training is necessary for school professionals to improve the quality of school-family collaboration.

### **Theme 5: Supported Learning Environment**

In the cognitive engagement literature, intrinsic motivation including autonomy, competence, and relatedness has a crucial influence on student engagement level (Reeve, 2006; Zyngier, 2007; Harris, 2008; Archambault, Janosz, Morizor, & Pagani, 2009). As

the component of relatedness is discussed in the teacher-student relationship theme, this section will focus on whether autonomy, competence, and other factors sustaining student motivation were observed in this study from participants' perspective.

### **Autonomy.**

Participants in this study expressed a lack of autonomy in the classroom. They indicated that they often have difficulties following school rules or instructions given by teachers. Due to the fact that some participants in this study are treated as adults in their home environments, following rules seems to present a significant challenge for them at school.

From student participants' perspective, they are required to give up freedom to some extent if they choose to be a good student at school. Reeve, Deci, and Ryan (2004) suggest that the self has a developmental need to meet its psychological needs and constantly practice growth-fostering behaviors to learn how to develop his or her own autonomy. Deci and Ryan (1987) also explain autonomy as a concept that it is an inner confirmation of one's action and it emanates from the self. Participants from this study expressed a sense of resistance to school rules and teachers' instructions. It may be summarized that "following rules" comprises losing autonomy, especially when the emerged conflict concerns how to dress, speak, and behave.

Harper (2007) suggests that some intentional behaviors are represented by autonomous initiation and regulated by choices, and so are referred to as self-determined actions. However, other behaviors are pressured or coerced by psychiatric factor or environmental force, so that they are usually referred as controlled actions. From student

participants' perspectives, they did not have opportunities to make decisions pertaining to their own learning at school. Instead, when they try to explain and argue for different ways in learning, the controlled context tends to trigger their misbehaviors because they perceive it as surrendering the power to make decisions. As a result, misbehaviors often lead to emotional actions and disengagement in academics.

Research has found that autonomy is a strong predictor of students' emotional engagement or disaffection (Skinner, et al., 2008). That is, students who are exposed to high autonomy-supported classroom contexts are more likely to show improvements in their efforts and satisfaction with the school work. However, students in low autonomy-supported environment tend to show increasing frustration and disaffection (Skinner, et al., 2008). This study's finding is consistent with this hypothesis. Since all participants in this study were identified as having an oppositional defiance disorder (ODD), anger and frustration management is an important focus in their service plans. However, the anger and frustration constantly escalated to the extent that they turned to disruptive behaviors in the classroom.

Research has indicated that autonomy-supported practice requires teachers to make efforts to nurture student's intrinsic motivation based on self-action (Reeve, 2006). In this study, learning was predetermined, and students' input was usually not taken seriously. As a result, students show an resistance and low academic engagement. One case manager participant suggested that learning difficulty was not really the main issue, but instead that misbehavior was the primary factor preventing these students from learning.

Therefore, from participants' perspective, the school did not provide an environment that allowed them to foster learning autonomy. Instead, the constructed classroom context guided by school rules and teacher instruction was likely to be a control-oriented context. Research has suggested that the level of student engagement reflects whether or not students are willing to engage with the constructed cultural practice at school (Zyngier, 2007; Smyth, 2007). This study found that the controlled context may play an influential factor determining students' low level of willingness to engage with the constructed cultural practice. Friere (1998) indicates that an important task in education practice is to allow learners, in their interaction with their teachers to engage in the experience so that they perceive themselves as social, historical, thinking, communicating, transformative, and creative persons. However, in this study, participants expressed that they were strictly limited by the school structure and the controlled context. As a result, their unwillingness to engage with such practice expressed their autonomy. Therefore, results of this study clearly illustrated how that controlled-oriented strategies comprise an influential factor in intensifying students' resistance and school disengagement.

### **Competence.**

One thing that should be noted in the findings of this study is the limited discussion on learning experiences with different instructional materials. One participant expressed his experiences in math class; however, the other two participants rarely shared their experiences related to this topic. Because the other two participants have long histories of suspension, their schooling experiences have been mainly about conflicts

with the school system, such as negative teacher-student relationship, and disciplinary measures taken by the school.

Research has indicated that students who believe they are competent tend to make more effort and persist longer before giving up (Patrick, Mantzicopoulos, Samarapungava, & French, 2008). This study confirms the relationship between perceived academic competence and effort. One participant, Richie, indicates that, if he cannot understand the question and assigned academic task after trying for couple minutes, he quits trying. Austin indicated that he was tired of feeling confused and frustrated so he usually did not make great efforts to complete assigned tasks.

Students' perceived academic competence may be low, yet their perceived personal competence may be sustained by their personal relationship in out-of-school settings such as the family environment or home community. One participant, Austin, reports that he has a close relationship with a group of friends in his community, but most of his friends are high school dropouts. As Austin's life circle is surrounded by his personal network within his community, academic performance was outside his concern.

Austin's case manager describes him in the following words, "*He thinks he is too cool for school*". Because his father and grandfather have worked at construction sites for decades, the whole family appears to not put great emphasis on education, according to case manager's perspective. Such belief has a significant influence on Austin. As might be expected, low academic achievement is not a critical matter to him and does not negatively affect his perceived competence level. From his perspective, school is a place where he can go to socialize with people and obtain a required document to enter the job

market. As a result, in this case, perceived competence does not have a direct relationship with student's behavior engagement. Instead, it is the perceived importance of the high school diploma for employment that has a direct relationship with his decision to continue to stay in school.

### **Factors Sustaining Students' Motivation.**

Research has suggested that parental aspiration is an important factor influencing students' academic outcomes and persistence (Bronstein, Ginsburg, & Herrera, 2005). In this study, parental aspiration appears to strongly influence students' continued involvement. One participant indicated that his main motivation to stay at school is the support of his mother. He further expressed that his future goal was to be a barber. Therefore, he wished to finish the school in order to attend barber school.

Austin indicated that his grandmother and his aunt were the support for him to complete school, and thus although he did not perceive academic performance critical, he would try his best to meet all school requirements. Randy indicated that dropping out of the school was once an option in his mind, because of his continual struggle with the school system and teachers. However, his family, his mentor from the church, and his case manager tried to explain to him the importance of receiving an education. He eventually made a decision to stay in school. Therefore, his support system and their aspirations are found to have a positive relationship with students' engagement.

Although these students and others like them may not show strong interests in learning, their support network has played an important role in sustaining their motivation to go to school. Research has suggested that parental role modeling significantly influences their



children's life-course expectations, the perceived importance of finishing the school, and the aspiration of getting a good job (Belgrave, 2009). The findings of this study suggest that having a positive role model and a support network are critical for enhancing students' motivation to go to school.

Another factor noted in this study that sustains students' learning motivation concerns their future plans. Two participants reported that their future plans helped them to force themselves to go to school because of the need of having a high school diploma. Therefore, future career aspiration motivated them to stay at school. However, students did not perceive that school professionals supported their plans. All participants indicated that they had never discussed their plans with any teachers or at an IEP meeting. Research has demonstrated that teacher support, career support, and family collaboration for career preparation are correlated with school engagement (Perry, Liu, & Pabian, 2010). Although teacher support were not observed from student participants' schooling experiences, having a mindset preparing for future career is confirmed to improve student engagement in this study.

Therefore, assisting students to develop a future career plan and foster their career aspiration is very crucial to their willingness to stay at school. In cognitive engagement literature, researcher suggested that this type of engagement usually concerns students' psychological involvement in learning, including a willingness to engage with effortful learning and meet task-oriented goals, even when students are not interested in the class materials (Archambault, Janosz, Morizot, & Pagani, 2009; Furlong & Christenson, 2008; Harris, 2008; Reeve, 2006). In this study, we found that students were very dissatisfied

with the teacher-student relationship and the instruction provided by teachers. However, the understanding of the importance of receiving an education through family or community support network made student participants to decide to stay in school. This is another type of expression of cognitive engagement. When student participants have developed an identity as a high school graduate, they made great efforts to stay at school even though they perceived their schooling experiences as a suffering journey.

Therefore, based on participants' descriptions, we believed that the support network which has ability to support students to develop a positive learning identity and to understand the importance of receiving an education has significantly influenced students' engagement level, especially concerning willing to stay in school.

### **Theme Discussion versus Research Questions**

In this section, how each research question can be answered by theme discussion in previous section will be discussed. At the end of this section, a table listing research questions and their corresponding theme discussions will be presented.

*Research Question 1-a: How does a perception of psychological need satisfaction influence the school engagement experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?*

- *How do students learning experiences reflect autonomy, competence, and a relatedness-supported environment?*

Concerning this question, from participants' perspective, students' learning experiences were not able to reflect that an autonomy, competence, and relatedness-supported environment was provided by the school. Furthermore, their psychological needs were not successfully met through their schooling experiences. In addition, the

control-oriented school context suppressed their seeking to meet their psychological needs. As a result, many control strategies were used to reduce their problem behaviors in order to have these students follow the school rules. The discussion of theme 3- teacher-student-relationships and theme 5 - supported-learning environment provide details to answer this question.

*Research Question 1-b: How does a perception of psychological need satisfaction influence the school engagement experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?*

- *What kinds of learning experiences sustain students' learning motivation?*

Concerning this question, the discussion in the fifth theme – supported-learning-environment has explained that support network which can successfully help student participants to understand the importance of receiving an education and develop an identity as high school graduates are major motivator for them to decide to stay in school.

*Research Question 1-c: How does a perception of psychological need satisfaction influence the school engagement experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?*

- *How do different types of learning experiences influence student engagement?*

For this question, the discussion of theme 1 – programs and services received by students can explain that how learning experiences associated with a caring teacher can improve student engagement. In this study, only one student participant briefly discussed his learning experiences. The other two participants rarely shared their learning experiences. Throughout the data analysis, I have noted that, when they answered questions concerning learning experiences, they would raise the topic of their relationship with the teacher and how they were treated by her. Therefore, whether a caring teacher

who can understand and identify the special needs of the student, and provide appropriate support during the learning process is the key. So from participants' perspective, different types of learning experiences can be interpreted as different types of teachers who help them to learn. However, they all reported that they did not have positive learning experiences in their high school because of their negative relationship with teachers.

To summarize the answer for research question 1, the psychological need satisfaction has significantly influenced the school engagement experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities. A caring teacher who is capable to provide autonomy, competence, relatedness-supported environments to support their social and learning needs is perceived as an important element in improving the school engaging experiences for these students.

*Research Question 2-a: What is the constructed meaning of schooling as reported by Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?*

- *What is the constructed meaning of learning and engagement?*

For this question, theme 1 – programs and services received by students, theme 2 – teacher-student-relationships, theme 3 – value conflicts, and theme 5 – supported learning environment all discusses the concept of learning. However, the meaning of engagement was not explicit in participants' descriptions.

For Austin, learning should involve social interactions. He believed that the way to learn is through discussing with the other person. However, for Richie, he needs other support to help him learn. In his mind, learning should involve a systematic learning

approach so he would know what to do next. The commonality of their definition of learning is social interaction. Richie also indicated that he required help from the teacher. If he did not get assistance from teachers, he usually quitted learning quickly. Therefore, learning, in this study, is found as constructing the knowledge through the communicative style. This is consistent to what Freire (1998) described as being a critical learner. However, this learning preference clearly differs from what the control-oriented context featured, which is a narrating teacher-student relationship.

*Research Question 2-b: What is the constructed meaning of schooling as reported by Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?*

- *What is the constructed meaning of completing high school?*

For this question, theme 3 – value conflicts and theme 5 – supported learning environment have provided answers.

Among three student participants, Austin has a strong identity concerning completing high school. Because his dad used to be a high school dropout and experienced many difficulties in his life, Austin has gradually developed an identity as a high school graduate. Another aspect of the meaning is that he did not want to have similar experiences as his dad had. Therefore, for him, completing high school represents his way of distinguishing himself from his dad. At the same, he also understands that having a high school diploma is crucial to enter the job market.

For Richie, because of his mom, he did not perceive himself having other options besides graduating from high school. However, he did indicate that he wanted to

graduate to go to barber school. Therefore, for him, completing high school represents that he can start to do something he really want for his life.

For Randy, although he understands the importance of receiving an education, his negative perception and psychological dissatisfaction of his school experiences partly contributes to his confusion pertaining to why he needs to complete high school. For him, completing high school also represents that he wants to start his new life, similar to Richie, even though he still does not have a clear goal.

Generally, completing high school means a new life for all student participants in this study.

*Research Question 2-c: What is the constructed meaning of schooling as reported by Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?*

- *What are students' aspirations upon completing high school?*

Concerning this question, theme 5 – supported learning environment provide answers. From students' perspective, the meaning of completing high school is similar to their aspirations upon completing high school. Based on their descriptions, their major aspiration upon completing high school is that they can start a new life and they can choose what they like to do for their life.

**Table 7. Research Question versus Theme Discussion**

<b>Research Questions</b>	<b>Theme Discussion</b>
1. <i>How does a perception of psychological need satisfaction influence the school engagement experiences of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?</i>	Theme 1: Programs and services received by students Theme 2: Teacher-student relationships Theme 5: Supported learning environment
a. <i>How do students' learning experiences reflect autonomy, competence, and relatedness-supported environment?</i>	Theme 2: Teacher-student relationships Theme 5: Supported learning environment
b. <i>What kinds of learning experiences sustain students' learning motivation?</i>	Theme 5: Supported learning environment
c. <i>How do different types of learning experiences influence student engagement?</i>	Theme 1: Programs and services received by students
2. <i>What is the constructed meaning of schooling as reported by Lumbee Indian students with disabilities?</i>	Theme 1: Programs and services received by students Theme 2: Teacher-student relationships Theme 3: Value conflicts Theme 5: Supported learning environment
a. <i>What is the constructed meaning of learning and engagement?</i>	Theme 1: Programs and services received by students Theme 2: Teacher-student relationships Theme 3: Value conflicts Theme 5: Supported learning environment
b. <i>What is the constructed meaning of completing high school?</i>	Theme 3: Value conflicts Theme 5: Supported learning environment
c. <i>What are students' aspirations upon completing high school?</i>	Theme 5: Supported learning environment

## **Recommendations**

### **Cultural Competence Training**

Because of fast growing ethnic student population in the United States, cultural competence or cultural responsive pedagogy serves a conceptual framework allowing us to have a better understanding to meet diverse needs of students from different backgrounds, including disability, ethnicity, race, gender, or religion. Ritter and Skiba (2006) define that cultural competence as a developmental process where a set of professional attitudes, professional knowledge, and education policy come together to form a system providing effective instruction meeting students' diverse needs.

This study has clearly shown that students were not receiving cultural competence programs and services at school. Through exploring the finding of this study, school professionals and teachers identify their roles as a professional delivers knowledge or provides services for students at school. Their expression of painful and suffering experiences is vivid. It is very important for teachers and other school professionals to have a cultural competence when they educate students with diverse special needs.

Ritter and Skiba (2006) indicate that being culturally competence requires professional knowledge, skills, experiences, and the ability to engage with practices supporting the learning of all students. They further pointed out that diversity training should include more than appreciating other cultures. In order to improve the teaching practice, teachers should be able to use reflective practice to understand their teaching behaviors at a deeper level. Further, receiving training and working to meet all students' needs to enhance a sense of cultural awareness toward educating students with diverse



backgrounds including ethnicity and disability will also benefit teachers' professional knowledge and skills in providing cultural competence teaching practice.

Schools are mandated by law to provide equal education opportunities for all students. In order to address the complex issue of disproportionate representation of minority students in special education, and gaps in achievement, graduation, and dropout rate between ethnic minority students with disabilities and other students, a project named Local Equity Action Development (LEAD) has started to implement at 2006. An important element in this project is that school administrators create opportunities allowing teachers to have dialogues on race, ethnicity, disability, and applications to practice (Ritter, & Skiba, 2006). Gloria Ladson Billings (2006) suggested that, although students with emotional and behavioral disabilities have experienced different types of mental and emotional issues, the consideration of their social, linguistic, and socioeconomic background can help to have accurate disability identification and appropriate services grounded in cultural competence practices.

Therefore, it will be crucial for North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) to start to work with local districts to create cultural competence dialogue opportunities for all teachers and school professionals.

### **Discipline**

Research has indicated that exclusionary and punitive practices in discipline have been used more often in the United States (Lewis-Palmer, Sugai, & Larson, 1999; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003; Cartledge, Singh, and Gibson, 2008). In this study, we have found that two participants with long suspension history were receiving harsh

discipline actions taken by school. As a result, these discipline actions appeared not to address their behavior problems effectively. Instead, these measures worsen their behaviors to some extent and this is consistent to earlier research (Lewis-Palmer, Sugai, & Larson, 1999; Raffaele Mendez & Knoff, 2003).

In this study, we have observed that students have realized the power structure which can dominate their schooling experiences, and their not following school rules can result in the denial of education services. From students' perception, their poor relationship and negative interactions with teachers contributed to their being suspended or removed from the classroom. The individuals with Disability Education Act (IDEA) devise specific procedures for school districts to follow when they apply discipline suspension or exclusion on students with disabilities to ensure their education rights be protected. However, discipline removal was not prohibited (Yell, Drasgow, & Rozalski, 2001; Achilles, McLaughlin, & Croninger, 2007). Although policymakers have tried to address the issue of denial in providing education services for students with behavioral challenges, some incidence of this scenario still happened, such as in this study.

In order to address this issue, schools should be encouraged to develop a more democratic-oriented school context associated with autonomy-supported classroom practice. In an autonomy-supported practice, teachers provide opportunities for choice and student-directed learning activities, and create a learning context encouraging independent study, problem-solving, and student perspective (Deci, Eghrari, Patrick, & Leone, 1994; Trouilloud, Sarrazin, Bressoux & Bois, 2006). Although students with disabilities may experience difficulties to initiate a learning activity on their own,

teachers can provide assistance or prepare materials congruent to their knowledge level, so they can gradually be accustomed to such learning style. Another benefit of this practice is to support students' learning needs through their taking initiative in the learning process.

Because autonomy-supported practice requires a close interpersonal relationship to support students' learning needs, it is crucial for teachers to develop a different definition of being a teacher. Therefore, to support teachers' reflective practice, principals and school administrators should also create various opportunities for teachers to have dialogue in implementing autonomy-supported practice in their classroom.

### **Limitation**

In this section, discussion of limitations will be provided. There are three major limitations of this study and each of them will be discussed in details as follows.

#### **1. Whether hermeneutic phenomenology is an appropriate research methodology?**

In the critical constructivism research paradigm, one critical element concerns the nature of the relationship between the investigator and research participants (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). This study was designed to obtain information from participants' perceived reality based on their individual experiences and the knowledge learned from the inquiry process should be viewed as a constructed product. In order to obtain accurate picture concerning participant's perceived reality, the crucial element is that a close relationship between the investigator and the participant should be in place. However, it did not happen in my expected manner.

Because participants eventually were recruited through case managers from a local agency, all communications with participants should go through case managers. Additionally, as I come from a very different cultural background, all participants expressed similar doubts about why I was interested in interviewing them during the inquiry process. One participant, Randy, specifically expressed that he did not know if I would understand his points since I never studied at any American high school. As the relationship between the investigator and participants can determine how much information they are willing to share, clearly, the relationship between me and my participants were not enough to let them share whatever in their minds.

As this research was designed based on the philosophy of knowledge co-construction, the constructed product might not be able to reflect the true experiences of participants in this study. Many of these experiences may result from my interpretations of their perceptions. This is a major limitation of this study.

## **2. Communication difficulties**

Another major limitation is the communication difficulties happening during the inquiry process. Due to the fact that I, myself, is an international student and have a diverse cultural and linguistic background, language becomes my major concern when conducting this study. As the language of Lumbee Indians is called Lumbee English which has their unique pronunciations for some vocabularies, I have to make great efforts to understand what they really mean. During the inquiry process, if such misunderstanding happens very often, participants may feel that I do not understand them at all. This was happening during one of the interview between me and Randy.

Therefore, I believe that the language and communication difficulties are the second major limitation for this study.

### **3. Lack of practices in approaching cultural issue at inquiry process**

This study initially was designed to understand the perception of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities toward their schooling experiences. As very limited study have targeted on this student population, my very first intention was also to explore the cultural identity of the student. However, during the inquiry process, I found that using an unstructured interview method to explore participants' perceptions concerning their Indian heritage is very challenging for me. Therefore, the research focus remained at the level of their schooling experiences related to their frustration and suffering. Therefore, to employ an unstructured interview method may not be the best data collection method. This is another major limitation for this study.

### **Future Research Direction**

Although this study has documented three stories of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities, research targeted on Indian students with disabilities is very limited. Therefore, researchers who are interested in exploring schooling experiences to identify contributing factors to school engagement or school dropout phenomenon should take this population into account. More research on this population are required to contribute our knowledge base concerning providing appropriate education and services.

From this study, we have observed that teacher student relationship is a key factor determining their sense of schooling experiences from the perspective of Lumbee students with disabilities. That indicates that teachers play a significant role influencing

student outcomes and their psychological satisfaction with the school in Lumbee culture. Therefore, more research should be conducted to explore this specific topic to understand how Lumbee students with disabilities identify their roles and teachers' roles and what teacher characteristics demonstrate caring teachers from their perspectives.

Because of recruitment difficulties, this study only includes three student participants and three case manager participants. It has restricted the findings of this study to the maximum extent. Therefore, future researchers who are interested in this population and topic should make efforts to include more participants in the study, so the schooling experiences of Lumbee students with disabilities can be documented further.

### **Conclusion**

Although the purpose of this study is to explore schooling experiences of Lumbee students with disabilities and further identify critical factors contributing to their school disengagement and high dropout rate. Many challenges shared by student participants in this study are similar to many students with disabilities regardless of race and ethnicity. Therefore, providing appropriate education for students with disabilities is still the biggest challenge for school system.

In this study, we have noticed that the relationship between teachers and the students as well as families is a major issue affecting student perception of their schooling experiences. Managing a school context allowing students to exercise their learning autonomy and to build a meaningful relationship with teachers, and to engage with the scaffolding opportunities is a key.

This study also reveals that program and services provided for students with behavioral challenges are inappropriate to some extent. Although students with behavioral challenges are more likely to exhibit problem behaviors and make inappropriate decisions to violate school rules, providing appropriate behavior interventions and education services appear not present in the schooling experiences reported by student participants of this study. Ineffective teachers and boring curriculum are important factors contributing to student disengagement. Therefore, without improving quality of services for students with disabilities, the dropout phenomenon may be an ongoing issue in the region.

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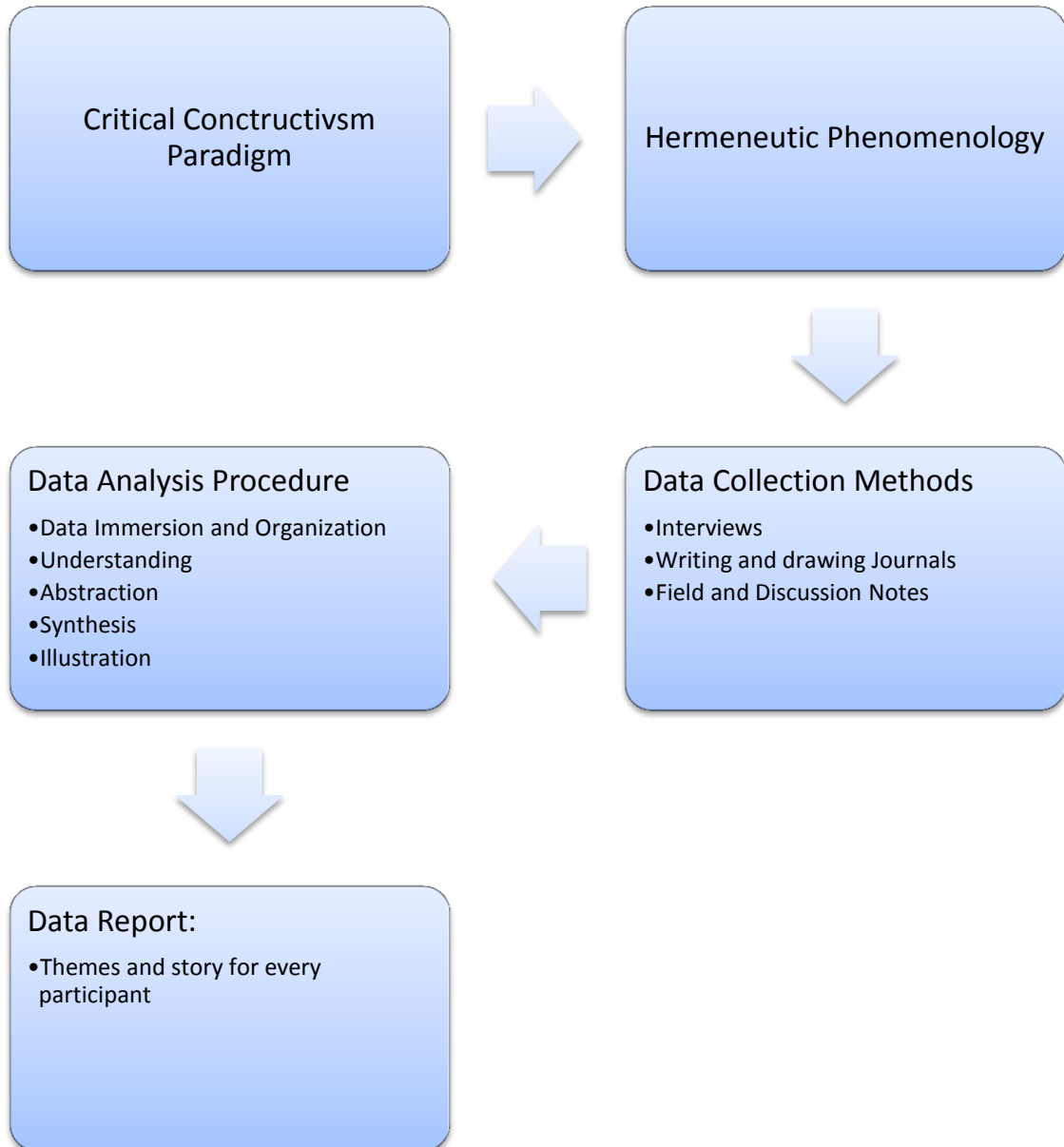
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## APPENDIX A: THE OVERALL RESEARCH APPROACH



## APPENDIX B: DATA COLLECTION GUIDE

Data Collection Sessions	Purpose	Example Questions
Interview 1 – Phase 1 (5-10 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building relationship with participants</li> <li>• Explaining the purpose of the study</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Please tell me a little bit about yourself.</li> <li>• Can you tell me what you like to do on the weekend or holidays?</li> </ul>
Interview 1 – Phase 2 (30-40 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding participant's general perception of schools.</li> <li>• Having participant to get accustomed to storytelling pattern</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What do you feel about going to school?</li> <li>• What does school mean to you?</li> <li>• Can you explain to me what does learning mean to you?</li> <li>• What experiences make you like to go to school and what makes you not like to go to school? Can you describe it for me?</li> </ul>
Interview 2 (70-90 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Exploring participant experiences in a deeper level including learning experiences, personal relationship, perception of capability and position in the society</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you describe to me what types of activities or ways of teaching you usually see in the class?</li> <li>• What types of activities you feel more connected?</li> <li>• What will expect yourself to do in the future? Can you explain to me where will you see yourself</li> </ul>

		in after 10 years?
Interview 3 (30-40 minutes)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The investigator will follow up discussion from second interview and try to understand the authentic meaning of what participant responses to questions.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Last time, you have mentioned about your experiences of being recognized as a great writer in literature class, can you tell me more about it? What do you mean by being recognized in front of the whole class?</li> </ul>
Journal discussion in second meeting and third meeting (10-20 minutes every session)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Understanding why participants would like to share particular experiences.</li> <li>• Clarifying what participants intend to express in the journal.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Can you tell me why you would like to share this incident? What does it mean to you?</li> <li>• Can you explain to me in more details about your journal in this page?</li> </ul>

## APPENDIX C: FIELD/DISCUSSION NOTES PROTOCOL

### Field/Discussion Notes Protocol

Session:

Participant:

Place:

Start time:

End time:

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Topic interested:

Topic not interested:

Description:

Description continue

Reflection:



## **APPENDIX D: STUDENT PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

### **UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO**

#### **CONSENT FOR A MINOR TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: Long Form**

**Project Title:** A Hermeneutic Phenomenology Study of Schooling Experiences of Lumbee Indian Students with High Incidence Disabilities

**Project Director:** Marilyn Friend, Ph.D.

**Participant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

#### **Research Purpose and Procedures**

The author of this study is inviting your child to participate in a research project that investigates the schooling engaging experiences of Lumbee Indian students with high incidence disabilities. The study will involve approximately 9 Lumbee Indian high school students who are currently attending 10<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, or 12<sup>th</sup> grade, and are identified with either a learning disability (LD), emotional disturbance (ED), or mild intellectual disability. The research will start from July 1, 2010 to November 30, 2010. Your child will be asked to complete three interviews, two journal discussion sessions, and a writing or drawing journal. During the interviews, your child will be asked questions related to his or her schooling experiences and he or she is encouraged to share anything related to his or her positive or negative experiences they like to. Three interviews will take approximately 50-65 minutes, 60-75 minutes, and 30-45 minutes respectively. The interview will be scheduled in every two weeks. Two journal discussion sessions will take approximately 10-20 minutes each time followed with second and third interview. You will be receiving the journal at the first meeting and which will be collected at the end of third meeting.

All interview and journal discussion sessions will be audio-taped. Only project director and student researcher in this study will have access to the data. All personal identifiable information and collected data will be treated as strictly confidential.

#### **Risks and Discomforts**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Due to the fact that this study intends to explore both your child's positive and negative experiences and psychological involvement with any school related activities. There is a minimal chance that your child may experience emotional discomfort at some point. If your child feel any discomfort during the interview or journal discussion session, he or she are free to pass any questions unanswered.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Marilyn Friend who may be contacted at (336) 256-0153 or by student researcher Ms. HsuanFang Hung who may be contacted at (336) 337-8545.

### **Potential Benefits**

Due to the fact that this study is to explore an overall schooling experiences from your child's perspective, the potential benefit he or she may gain from participating in this study is to be able to develop a sense of self-understanding in a deeper level and which will benefit him or her both in learning and future career planning.

As limited research has targeted the population of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities, results of this study may contribute to raise cultural awareness of professionals to meet the need of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities. Further, this study will be able to help to represent an authentic perspective from your child in dropout and student engagement literature to increase professional understanding about the challenge experienced by Lumbee Indian students with disabilities and the support required for these students.

### **Incentives and Costs**

You will be receiving a \$30 Domino's Pizza gift card and a \$20 Wal-Mart gift card as incentives for willing to participate in this study. Gift cards will be sent to you after your child completes the third meeting. If you decide to withdraw your child from participating in this study after the second meeting, you will be still receiving a \$20 Wal-Mart gift card. If you decide to withdraw your child from participating in this study before second meeting, you will not be able to receive incentives designated for this study. There are no costs to you or payments to you or your child as a result of participation in this study.

### **Confidentiality**

Because your child's voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, confidentiality for things said on the tape cannot be guaranteed although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

Only project staff will have access to information in this study, and your child's confidentiality will be ensured by assigning pseudonyms and identification numbers. All personally identifiable information will be removed when data will be used for research analysis.

Results of this study to be potentially published will contain no identifiable data. All collected data will be kept in locked file cabinets in one of student researchers' home office located in off campus location and electronic files stored in computers will be password protected. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. All written data will be shredded and electronic data will be permanently destroyed from computer hard drives after five years.

**Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

You have the right to refuse to allow your child to participate or to withdraw him or her at any time, without penalty. If your child does withdraw, it will not affect you or your child in any way. If you or your child chooses to withdraw, you may request that any data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness allow your child to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you have read it or it has been read to you, you fully understand the contents of this document and consent to your child taking part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child who wishes to participate in this study described to you by \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Participant's Parent/Legal Guardian's Signature      Date: \_\_\_\_\_

## Participant Assent Form

*Study Title:* A Hermeneutic Phenomenology Study of Schooling Experiences of Lumbee Indian Students with High Incidence Disabilities

My name is \_\_\_\_\_.

I would like to talk to you about participating in my research study. I want to learn about your story pertaining to how you feel about school, how you see about coming to school to study, and what have you experienced at the school.

Your parent(s) said it was ok for you to be in this study and have signed a form like this one.

We would like you to take part because you have attended to high school more than a year, has a Lumbee Indian heritage, and also has been identified with a learning disability (LD) (or emotional disturbance (ED), or intellectual disability).

### **What if I want to stop?**

You do not have to say “yes”, if you do not want to take part. We will not punish you if you say “no”. Even if you say “yes” now and change your mind after you start doing this study, you can stop and no one will be mad at you.

### **What will I have to do?**

By willing to participate in this study, you will have to complete three interviews, two journal discussion sessions, and a writing or drawing journal. During the interviews, you will be asked questions related to your schooling experiences and you are encouraged to share anything related to your positive or negative experiences if you like to. Three interviews will take approximately 50-65 minutes, 60-75 minutes, and 30-45 minutes respectively. The interview will be scheduled in every two weeks. Two journal discussion sessions will take approximately 10-20 minutes each time followed with second and third interview. You will be receiving the journal at the first meeting and which will be collected at the end of third meeting.

We will meet three times. The meeting location can be public library, school media center, or any your preferred setting except fast food restaurants.

### **Will anything bad happen to me?**

As you will be the one sharing your experiences with me, you may experience any emotional discomfort when you share your negative school experiences. When that happens, you are free to pass any questions I ask or stop sharing any uncomfortable experiences.

**Will anything good happen to me?**

As this study is about your story of your schooling experiences, you may be able to understand yourself better after participating in this study, especially in the direction of who you want to be and what you would like to do in the future.

Because not many literature or articles research students who have similar backgrounds like yours, your story will help many teachers or professionals who work with students similar to your background understand better in how to support you appropriately at the school setting.

**Do I get anything for being in this study?**

If you complete the whole study, you and your family will receive a \$30 Domino's Pizza gift card and a \$20 Wal-Mart gift card. If you discontinue participating in the study after second meeting, you and your family will still receive a \$20 Wal-Mart gift card. If you discontinue to participate before second meeting, you may not be able to receive any incentives designated for this study.

**What if I have questions?**

You are free to ask questions at any time.

If you understand this study and want to be in it, please write your name below.

---

Signature of child

---

Date

**APPENDIX E: CASE MANAGER PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM**

**UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT GREENSBORO**

**CONSENT FOR A MINOR TO ACT AS A HUMAN PARTICIPANT: LONG  
FORM**

**Project Title:** A Hermeneutic Phenomenology Study of Schooling Experiences of Lumbee Indian Students with High Incidence Disabilities

**Project Director:** Marilyn Friend, Ph.D.

**Student Researcher:** HsuanFang Hung, Ph.D Candidate

**Participant's Name:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Research Purpose and Procedures**

The author of this study is inviting you to participate in a research project that investigates the schooling engaging experiences of Lumbee Indian students with high incidence disabilities. The study will involve approximately 3 Lumbee Indian families whose children are currently at high school age and have attended to high school for more than a year, and are identified with either a learning disability (LD), emotional disturbance (ED), or mild intellectual disability. 3 case managers who have been working with the three families are also invited to participate in this study. The research will occur between Aug 1, 2010 to November 30, 2010. You will be asked to complete an individual interview and it will approximately take an hour.

**Risks and Discomforts**

The Institutional Review Board at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro has determined that participation in this study poses minimal risk to participants. Due to the fact that this study intends to explore your perspective regarding the school challenges your client have experienced and your experiences working with the family as well as the school, there is a minimal chance that you may experience emotional discomfort at some point. If you feels any discomfort during the interview, you are free to pass any questions unanswered.

If you have any concerns about your rights, how you are being treated, or if you have questions, want more information or have suggestions, please contact Eric Allen in the Office of Research Compliance at UNCG at (336) 256-1482. Questions, concerns or complaints about this project or benefits or risks associated with being in this study can be answered by Dr. Marilyn

Friend who may be contacted at (336) 256-0153 or by student researcher Ms. HsuanFang Hung who may be contacted at (336) 337-8545.

### **Potential Benefits**

As limited research has targeted the population of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities and the perspective of case managers on school challenges experienced by this population, results of this study may contribute to raise cultural awareness of professionals to meet the need of Lumbee Indian students with disabilities and to the collaboration literature on interagency collaboration. After the study is completed, results of the study will be shared with you.

### **Incentives and Costs**

You will receive a \$20 Wal-Mart gift card as incentives for participating in this study. Gift cards will be given to you when you complete the interview. There are no costs to you or payments to you as a result of participation in this study

### **Confidentiality**

Because your voice will be potentially identifiable by anyone who hears the tape, confidentiality for statements made on the tape cannot be guaranteed, although the researcher will try to limit access to the tape as described below.

Only the researcher and student researcher will have access to information in this study, and your confidentiality will be ensured by assigning pseudonyms and identification numbers. All personally identifiable information will be removed when data analyzed.

Results of this study may be published but will contain no identifiable data. All collected data will be kept in locked file cabinets in one of student researchers' home office located in off campus location and electronic files stored in computers will be password protected. All information obtained in this study is strictly confidential unless disclosure is required by law. All written data will be shredded and electronic data will be permanently destroyed from computer hard drives after five years.

### **Voluntary Consent by Participant:**

You have the right to refuse to participate or to withdraw at any time without penalty. If you do withdraw, it will not affect you in any way. If you choose to withdraw, you may request that any data which has been collected be destroyed unless it is in a de-identifiable state.

If significant new information relating to the study becomes available which may relate to your willingness to continue to participate, this information will be provided to you.

By signing this consent form, you are agreeing that you have read it or it has been read to

you, you fully understand the contents of this document and consent to your child taking part in this study. All of your questions concerning this study have been answered. By signing this form, you are agreeing that you are the legal parent or guardian of the child who wishes to participate in this study described to you by \_\_\_\_\_.

\_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Participant's Signature



## APPENDIX F: OVERALL RESEARCH PROCEDURE AND CONSENT

### PROCESS CHART

